# Toasty

THE BREAD APPRECIATION ZINE

FEATURING OVER 100 CREATORS

## Thanks for downloading Toasty!

This was truly an adventure. The response Toasty got greatly exceeded my expectations. We had 220 interest check replies for a zine that was just about bread. Sorry croissants, the-not-actually-bread-but-still-bread-in-our-hearts bread. Special thanks to wikipedia for their bread, bread rolls, and buns list that helped guide us on what is, and is not bread.

I'd like to thank the moderators who applied and joined me on this journey. All of them fully aware that we would be accepting any bread lover.

I'd also like to thank the contributors who made some amazing pieces. It's not easy to be a part of such a big project and they were very kind to us, especially when it came to the distinction between bread and pastries. We compromised and allowed some pastries.

Grab some bread and enjoy the ~~fruits~~ breads of their labor.

Stay Toasty,
Mod Lucy

breadzine

# MODERATORS

ORGANIZATION, DESIGN, SOCIALS

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COMMUNICATIONS

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INTERN

**bunkbd** twitter:bunkbd

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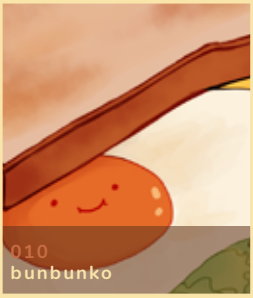
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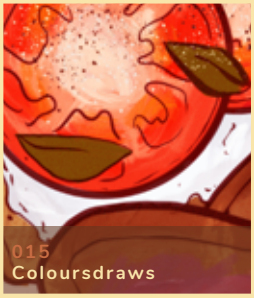
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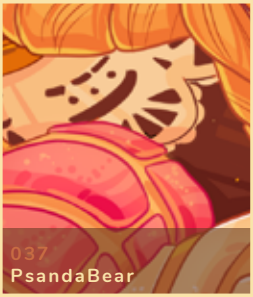

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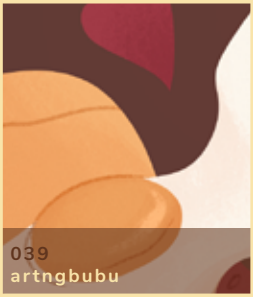

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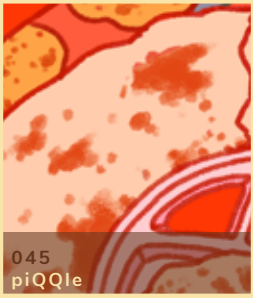

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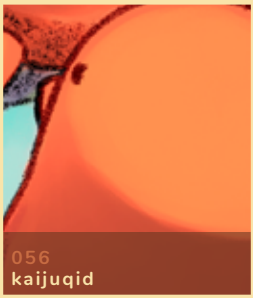

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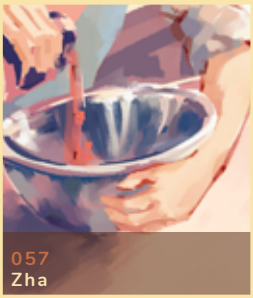

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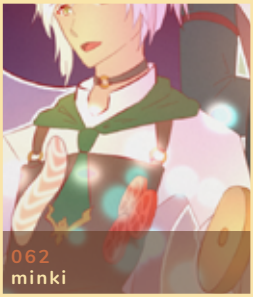

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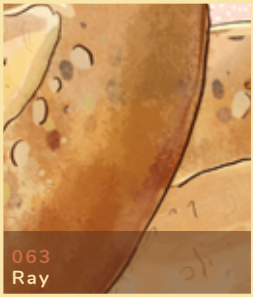

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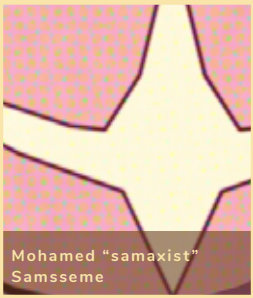

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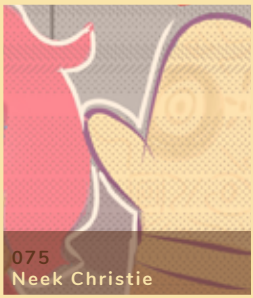

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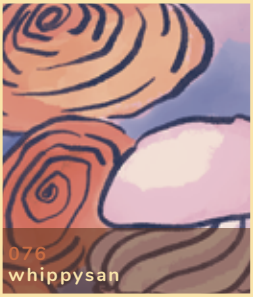
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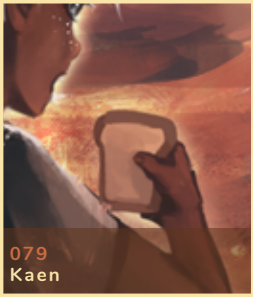
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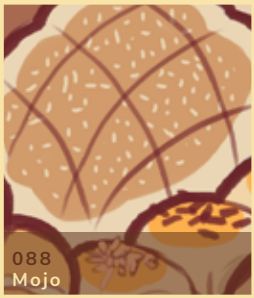
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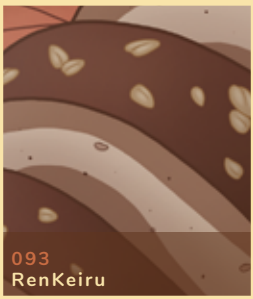
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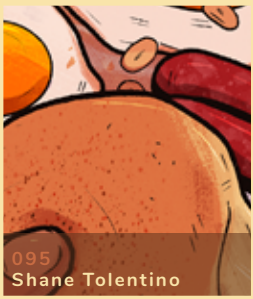
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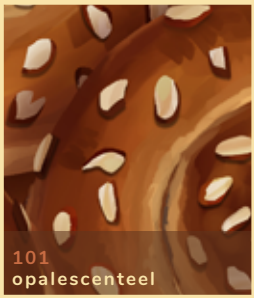
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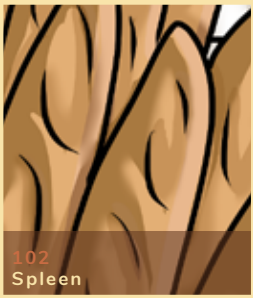
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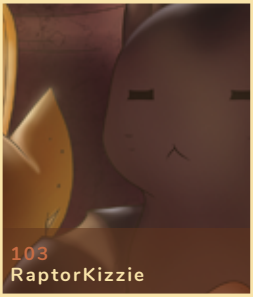

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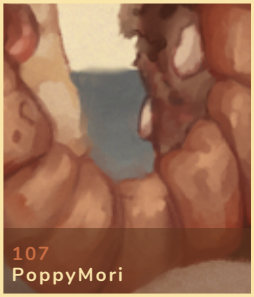

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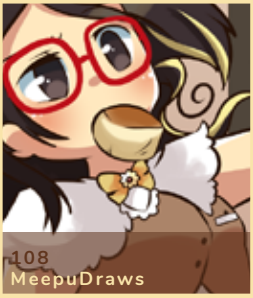

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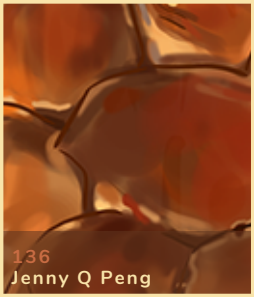

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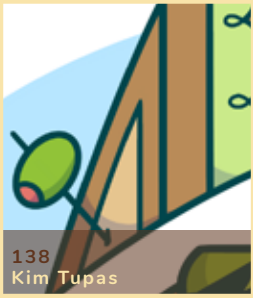

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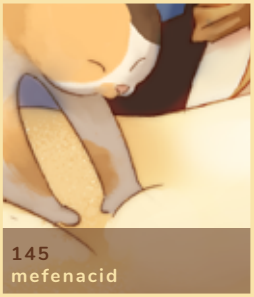

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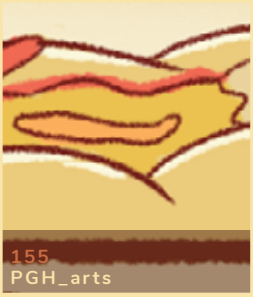

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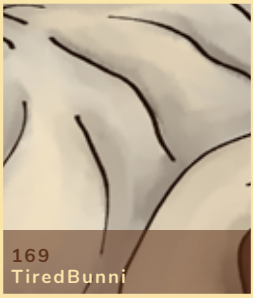

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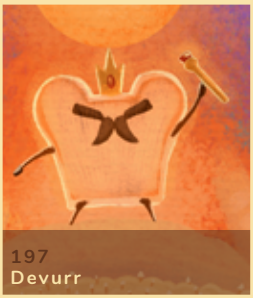

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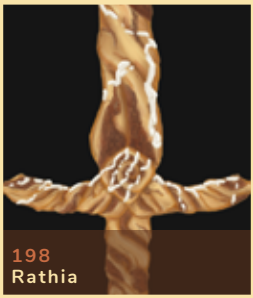

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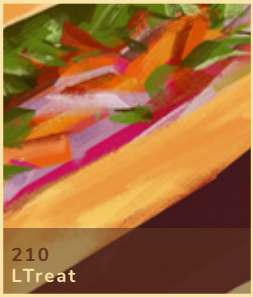

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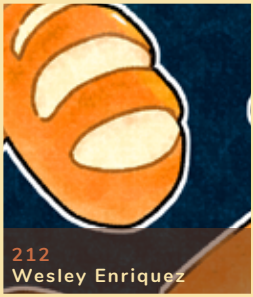

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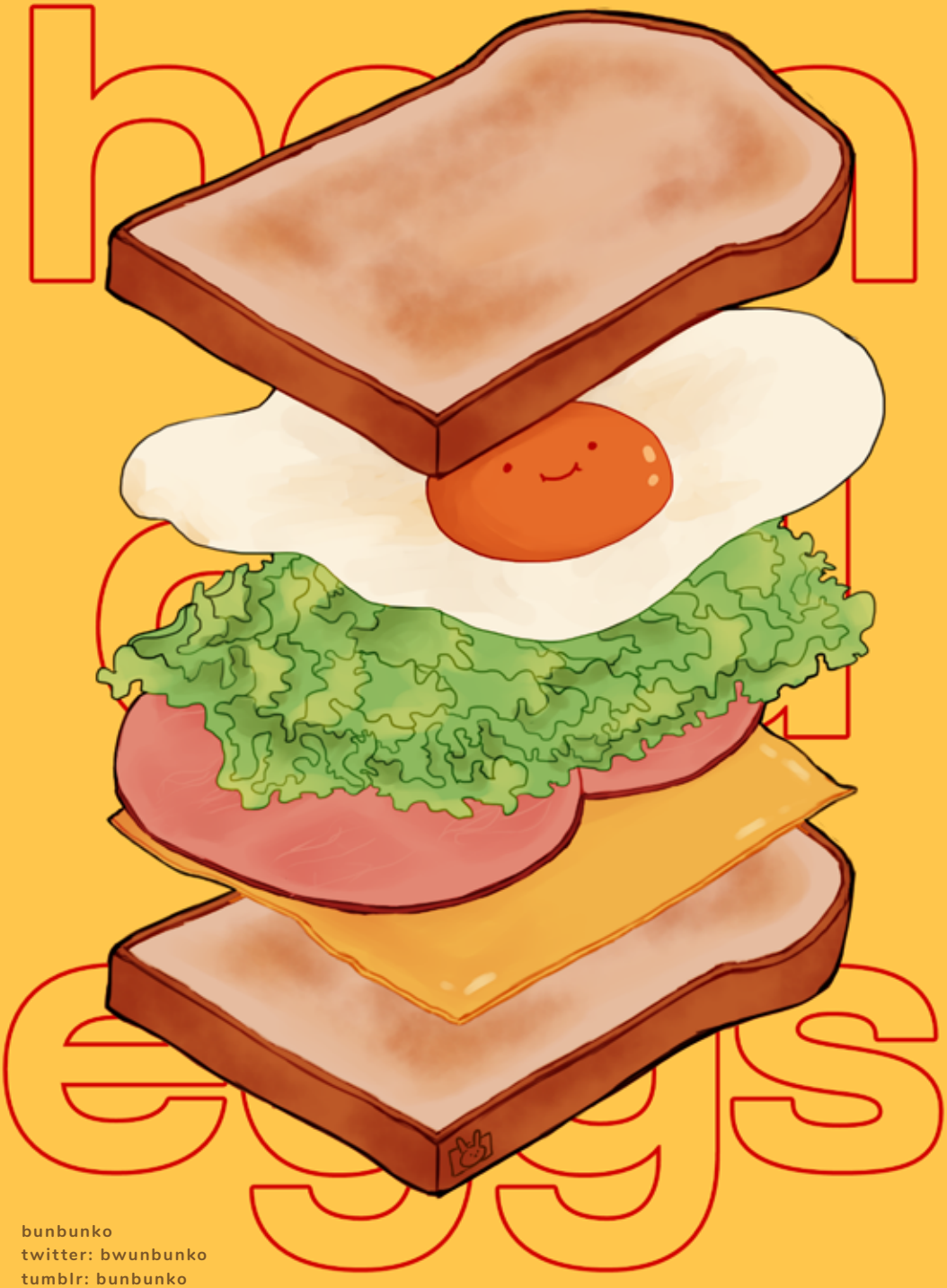


bunbunko
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Chi
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# Memories

Luce
tumblr: silverliningslurk, ao3: farfetched

Bread. It's comforting, isn't it? The ultimate comfort food: toast with butter, a night out eased in one bite. A fluffy brioche on holiday, melting in the mouth, the best kind of breakfast. A quick baguette in a train station, on the train watching the scenery go by in a blur.

I have so many memories of bread.

A big memory — at the top of mountain in Canada a cafe; a soup-dipped cheese sandwich heals the soul, a mountain-top lake healing the eyes, lending energy for the way down, the best earned meal I ever ate.

A small memory — a fresh cinnamon roll straight out the oven, too hot to eat but eaten anyway, doughy and steaming and soft and sugary.

When you've had fine bread, the mediocre stuff becomes so much more disappointing. A service station sandwich, a day old or more, soggy and encroaching on lifelessness. A lifeline more than an experience, sustenance over taste.

An old memory — bored in the lunch hall, rolling bits of bread back into dough between fingers, a cheese sandwich for the thousandth time in a row. So many cheese sandwiches, that I can't bear them now, many years later.

A new memory — a freshly toasted crumpet shared on a rainy day, hot and laden with butter, too good alone to have anything else on it. Going back for another when one is never enough.

Sometimes I crave seeded bread on toast. It reminds me of university, with an infinite choice of meals and so stuck, I fall back to bread. With soup on a cold day, feeling empty—so craving the familiar. Crisp toast, melting salted butter, everything I need in food in one.

Memories shared — the morning after a house party, someone taking it upon herself to make bacon sarnies for anyone who wants one. Healing. The knowledge of the end of term, knowing I will never see this person again. I recall nothing of her, but I remember the bread.

Memories alone — a local train trundles along, carrying me, a chocolate chip roll in my mouth, nothing fancy but carried with me onto the platform in a satisfied stomach and a smile.

Memories at home — making pizza dough and watching it rise, spread with toppings and oh so good. A bagel with my sibling, feta cheese and olives; a tasty lunch. Banana bread gifted by a leaving work friend, energy for the shift ahead in a squidgy chocolaty treat. Messy to eat but so worthwhile.

Memories abroad — skiing down to a mountain hut for a crepe, warm and silky and sweet. Poffertjies in Tallinn, topped with stewed raspberries and condensed milk, a newly made favourite. Searching in Belgium for the best waffles, sugary, crisp and delectable.

Such a staple, is bread, I forget all the many memories I have of it. Food: survival, and yet such a simple joy. What other essential is lifted to such art? Bakeries contain magic, where

a mere three ingredients combine to form a foodstuff, feeding billions over the centuries, amended and perfected as time rolls on. Flour, water, yeast. Given time, and care, it blossoms into something that has given me such joy.

A thousand art forms in dough, so many yet to try; so many memories left to make. Who could have known something so small could impact so widely? Bread, in comfort, in sharing, a global connection in time and space.

Bread, the ultimate comfort food. I await my future memories of you.

Coloursdraws
twitter, instagram: coloursdraws
ko-fi.com/coloursdraws

AngZ
twitter: Ang_z8S
instagram: ang_zeph

# 빵주세요!

bread please!

hhaelines
twitter hhaelines

# 割包

Kuromanju
twitter: Kur0manju
kuromanju.com
kuromanju.bigcartel.com

# Magical Morning

Zacksy
twitter: pointyhatwitch, tumblr: pointy-hat-witch
ko-fi.com/zacksy

A small ray of sunshine crept through the almost closed curtain, pinpointing itself right on Vera's left eye as if the universe was out for her, not letting her rest a second longer. It warmed up her face slowly, making her eyelid flutter until the last of her sleepiness was gone.

She blinked, scrunching up her face in the sudden light. Groaning, she rolled over and back again, trying to get the sun to go down again with her thoughts alone. Almost, just almost, her hand flicked the curtains shut again, but she knew better.

With a heavy sigh, she pushed the blanket back and sat up. The sun shining directly where her head had been laying was the only way to get her up, she knew that. So, to the sun's credit, this was all deliberate to get her to wake up.

Vera, oh so slowly slid her feet into her slippers to make her way to the kitchen. As soon as she walked out of the bedroom, the smell of freshly toasted bread and brewed coffee wavered through the air. Vera followed it purely on instinct.

She opened the kitchen door and let the broom sweep by before she entered. The sponge was cleaning a few dishes over the sink, making a few soap bubbles that glittered in the morning sun and then plopped in front of the window. On the countertop next to it, her coffee and toast were already waiting for her.

Rubbing her eye, Vera blindly took the cup and downed almost half of it in one go. The hot liquid seemed to finally start her engine, making her sigh in relief. Mornings were definitely not her thing but it was all worth it, it was.

After emptying the cup with a second big gulp, Vera slowly spread some butter on her toast that melted and made the surface glisten. Toasted bread was just the superior breakfast food.

Like it was brewing itself, the cup filled with steaming coffee again. When Vera took the cup, munching on her toast, she heard the door open behind her and footsteps slowly approaching.

Fingers carded through her short, unruly hair, smoothing out some of the knots that formed overnight. Vera closed her eyes with a small sigh. The hands kept caressing her hair and head, slowly pulling it back to tie it into a low ponytail, though most of the hair on top of Vera's head wasn't long enough yet and fell back right away. It didn't matter.

The hands drew back and Vera was already longing for them again when warm lips kissed the back of her neck. All too fast, they withdrew and the footsteps walked back out of the kitchen again.

Vera sighed for the third time this morning. Longingly, lovingly, content. Her toast and coffee tasted even better now.

After finishing her toast and a second cup of coffee, Vera tossed the dishes into the sink, which earned her an angry floating sponge splashing some water on her, and with a spring in her steps walked into the bathroom.

After her morning routine to get ready and finally getting dressed, Vera made her way downstairs. Through the small window in the staircase, she could see that the sun was almost up fully, which made her walk a little faster. Even after years in the business, she never learned to be on time. And to be totally honest, she probably never will.

Upon entering the spacious kitchen downstairs, Vera was welcomed by the sweet smell of various cakes, muffins, tartelette, and other pastries. CC was standing on a small stool to reach the top of the cupcakes better she was decorating. The tip of her tongue stuck out between her lips as she carefully placed a cherry on top of the buttercream.

"CC," Vera called out to her wife, considerately waiting for her to finish.

"Ah, Vera!" CC turned around, her frilly apron swirling with the motion. "Good morning!"

Vera had always thought that CC's smile was brighter than the sun, blindingly at times. However, it made her smile with her.

"Morning," Vera grinned. She walked up to the worktable in the middle of the kitchen and placed a hand on CC's hip who already pushed herself up on her toes, eagerly waiting with closed eyes.

"CC," Vera giggled, "you're on the stool, you're taller than me right now."

"Oh." CC blinked, looking surprised. With a small step she landed softly on the ground and repositioned herself, feet rolled up on her toes, eyes closed. Vera was so in love.

She leaned down and kissed her wife on the lips, which made both of them smile.

"Good morning, my gremlin," CC chuckled and stepped back on the stool, resuming her work. "I'm almost done, then you have all the space for yourself."

"Take your time, sunshine," Vera mumbled as she rolled up her sleeves standing in front of one of the numerous cupboards. They both knew this kitchen by heart and didn't need to look for anything, so Vera already grabbed for the containers of different flours without really looking at them, kicking the door shut again.

There was some kind of rhythm between them and their way of working. First of all, they started to work at different times in the morning. Whereas CC flourished in the morning and could get up with the first sound of her alarm, Vera snoozed her alarm at least for half an hour usually, an hour at most. Therefore, they started their work at different times, with CC making the dough that needed to rise and the pastries.

About an hour later, Vera came to work as well on all the different kinds of bread that would sell right then when they came out of the oven. CC would often use the half-hour in between to finish the pastries and to open their shop with a cup of tea on their back patio, listening to the birds and watching the sun rise slowly.

That's why CC 'humphed' triumphantly as she placed the last of the cherries on the cupcakes, wiping her forehead with her sleeve.

“Done!” she exclaimed, untying her apron. “Call me, if you need anything!” She rushed toward Vera to place a small peck on her cheek and then ran outside the kitchen again.

After putting on her own apron and hairband, to keep it from falling into her face, Vera washed her hands thoroughly before pulling out various bowls, both empty and some with already risen dough. Perfect.

Some of the bread, Vera did them so often she could probably prepare them in her sleep. These were the more “plain” breads that they have stocked in abundance for their regulars and walk-in customers alike. Bread rolls, whole-grain bread, brown loaf, rye bread, to name just a few. They were done the fastest, so Vera usually started with them.

Then they had some types of bread, their regulars requested and they had them in limited quantities such as naan, bap, stottie cake, and curry bread. Their customers came from all over the world and they had to keep up their reputation, after all.

Today though, they had a special order for brioche. The recipe was quite simple, even for Vera’s standards but it was for around 300 people. That was a lot of dough. And it was a constant kneading-and-let-it-rest type of recipe. CC had helped her prepare the dough last evening, so it could rest overnight in the refrigerator, with Vera waking up once last night to put it into greased pans and letting it rest again, so Vera could start with it right away in the morning.

Vera finished cutting and shaping all the dough for their usual bread and put them in the oven for their respective time, before getting ready for the monster order.

Both CC and Vera had the unwritten rule to never use magic in the kitchen: their bread was all hand-kneaded, each and every one of them prepared with care. (There was a lot of debate in their witch bakery circle about what it meant to be “prepared with care” because even if the dough was kneaded with magic, it was still with care, right? But they were still a long way from reaching a consensus.)

But for this particular order, they made a small exception. Vera would of course still knead everything by hand, but she used some magic to reduce her walking time such as levitating the bowls and ingredients around to have space and still have it right by her side. As well as not tempering with the ovens, but putting the baking trays in from far away and turning the ovens to the right temperature and such.

About half an hour later, CC poked her head inside. “You need any help?”

Vera jumped a little, too concentrated to get everything perfect. She shook her head with a small smile. “Nope, everything under control.”

“Great,” CC smiled but put her finger up, “don’t forget to relax your shoulders and stretch! You remember the last time we had to get you one of those fir needle neck pillows?”

Oh, yes. Vera remembered all too well. Her neck was stiff from all the kneading and rolling, which made her lay in bed all day with this pillow that kept on shooting needles into her muscles to relax her. How in the world would that be relaxing? But it worked, so she didn’t complain. No need for a repetition though.

She made a face and pushed her shoulders down, taking a deep breath.

“Good girl.” CC blew her a kiss and disappeared away.

While CC prepared the front of the shop, showing off all of her pastries in the windows, Vera resumed her quest to finish all the brioche in time. But she wasn’t worried. She was the best at making bread — she would never disappoint a customer.

They implemented a spell with which no one inside the shop could hear the noise from the kitchen, except themselves of course, but they could hear everything from the kitchen just fine. That was why Vera could hear the familiar chime of the front door being opened and the footsteps and voices of the first customers of the day. Right that instant, the first few oven doors clicked open, letting the smell of freshly baked bread float through the air.

Vera interrupted her cleaning, since all the brioche dough was in the oven already to get the trays. Just in time for the first order, Vera stepped through the bead curtain to reveal the bread and bread rolls.

“Oooohhh!” came the unison sound of their customers, followed by a shared inhale and a bright smile with the exhale.

CC and Vera’s gaze met. That was the moment all the stress and getting up at such an early time was worth it. That was why they were doing this. To see their customers smile without even saying a word. Just to make the morning of everyone else a little brighter with their work.

Person after person placed their order and Vera rushed in and out the kitchen to refill their display. CC managed the counter with a constant smile and even squished in some small talk to entertain the waiting crowd. A round teapot and coffeepot

made their round to give out free cups with their breakfast or for the ones that were still waiting.

There was another chime from the kitchen to indicate that the brioche was ready and Vera made her way to the back again. The sweet smell filled the air, making Vera smile herself. Bread just had this kind of effect, huh?

Pulling out tray after tray, Vera drizzled the glaze over the steaming loaves that were already on the racks, until every single one was glistening. From experience, Vera always made an extra roll or small loaf for herself. She learned the hard way that she wasn't immune to the desire to sample everything she made for a customer. Instead, she made a little more, sometimes even for CC if she asked to have a small piece herself.

Vera leaned against the countertop, her gaze wandering from the window, the sun had now risen completely, illuminating their garden with various herbs and vegetables, toward the beaded curtain through which she could see CC talking to a customer.

It had died down in the last couple of minutes, the rush of the morning people who had to start working early finally ebbing down until the second wave that would definitely come.

Vera took the first bite of her small brioche roll, sighing with content. The dough was soft, she almost didn't need to bite down at all; the glaze gave some texture and the vanilla added a little flavor. It was perfect.

When she opened her eyes again, CC was standing inside the kitchen, watching her silently, a smile playing on her lips.

"Having a break without me, I see," she teased as she stepped closer, arms wrapping around Vera's waist.

“Mh-hm,” Vera confirmed, putting one arm around her wife. She held the bread inviting for CC who gladly took a bite, as well.

“Mhmmm,” she sighed, her cheeks puffed up and smiling. And Vera kissed her. And kissed her again. And again. Making CC giggle and struggling against her chest, but not denying her any kiss.

Sometimes all it needs to be a perfect morning is just you and your wife and a mini-brioche.

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# The Bread of Salt

*A look into pandesal, a Filipino classic*

## Pan de sal

Ths Filipino bread roll is a simple and humble bun loved by the locals. It's name comes from a translation of the phrase *'bread of salt.'*

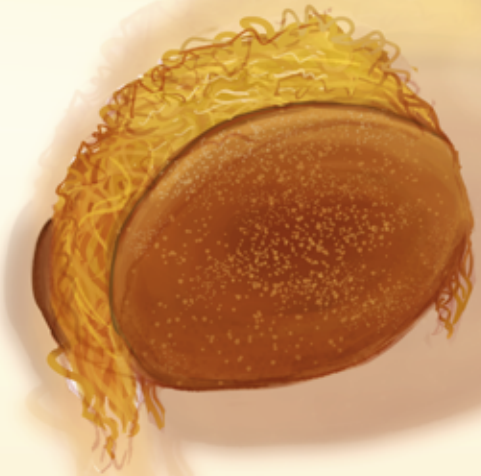
While usually only made of flour, eggs, yeast, sugar and salt, there exist variations that incorporate other ingredients like ube and moringa.

It is best eaten warm during cold mornings with coffee, *'sikwate'* or chocolate drinks!

## Pan & Pancit

- 1 pc pan de sal, cut in the middle
- 1 packet of *Lucky Me pancit canton*
*(preferrably in Chilimansi flavor)*

Mildly sweet bread meets flavorful savory instant noodles in a sandwich that's as easy to make as it is to eat. This quick bun is loved by students and people on-the-go. Not very nutritious, but definitely tasty!



## Ice cream 'panwich'

- 1 pc pan de sal, cut in the middle
- 3 scoops of ice cream of choice
**highly reccomend ube, macapuno and pandan*

If you're lucky enough, certain roadside ice cream vendors offer the option to get your ice cream on a pandesal instead of a cone.

Comapred to a cone, this bun is less prone to spilling on your hands, and leaves you feeling more satisfied!

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# Pandebono

Omar Kalam

Total time: 20 minutes | Makes 12 buns

## Ingredients:

- 12 oz. (60 g) queso blanco (farmer's cheese)
- 1/2 cup (60 g) all-purpose flour
- 1/4 cup (30 g) corn starch
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 egg

## Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.
2. Blend queso blanco in a food processor for one minute, until it is broken up into tiny pieces. Using a blender for this step is not advised, as it will generate heat quickly.
2. Move queso blanco and all other ingredients into a large food processor and run it for about 3 minutes or until the resulting dough is very soft and fluffy.
   This step can be done with a blender on a low power level. Blend ingredients for a few seconds at a time, making sure the contents do not get too hot. The dough is ready when it is consistent.
3. Form the dough into the desired shapes and lay them on a baking tray. For ease with handling dough, wet your hands with water to keep the dough from sticking to them.
4. Bake in oven for about 15 minutes. Baking times will vary based on the shape and size of dough, with smaller buns needing less time and larger buns needing more time. When finished, bread buns will rise and will have a rougher appearance and texture all-around.

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# robin bakes

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Blooming of yeast.
Creation of life.
Followed by the flour, the salt, the sugar.
Hydrated with water and oil.
Kneaded with aching shoulders and aching hands.
A wise man once said,
“Don’t praise the bread
That is not out of the oven.”

Robin bakes.
Every loaf, they breathe in life and love.
But for so long,
Robin has baked alone.
Baked goods fall flat.
Or grow stale from days left uneaten.

Robin knows now.
What they must do.
Must bring people together.
Like how they mix
Flour and salt and sugar.

On their uncle’s step, Robin appears.
The first words out of their mouth

Fill them with fear.
“I’m not who you knew,
But I am who I am
So I’d like to reintroduce myself.”

“Come in, dear.”
Their uncle says.
In a tone of voice not severe.
“It’s nice to see you. It’s been too long.
Come and eat with me, I can sing you a song.”

He closes the door
And shoos them inside.
To a candlelit room
Brimming with pride.
“I’ve heard about you, Robin, and you’ll be happy to hear
That no matter what
I love you all year.”

Robin used to think love was written in the stars.
An uncommon phenomenon.
Something they wouldn’t have or find
Unless they chose to suppress.
To push down their real self.

No, love is not bound by blood
Or obligation or tears.
Love is a choice.
Choosing to learn and not shun.
Choosing what you do and say with care.
Love is a hot oven,
Warm hands kneading sticky, supple dough.
Acceptance in the face of not understanding.

Robin bakes.
In a room lit by candles and care.
Bumping elbows with their loved one and
Waiting for the perfect proof.

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# sea of orchids

**blueberrytree**

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Aster wakes slowly and easily. Snatches of a sweet dream linger a moment longer before dissipating—sunlight slanting through glass and catching on long blonde hair, bright smiles and cold hands reaching for her own. The taste of laughter, rich and smooth. It's been a while since she last had a dream so pleasant, and she closes her eyes again to savor the feeling.

Her day begins in a similarly comfortable manner. Tangerine is fast asleep at the top of his cat tree and barely stirs when the teapot whistles. Aster washes her face while the tea steeps before retrieving the paper from the front porch and settling cross-legged at the kitchen table to attempt the daily cross-word puzzle.

The jagged edges of Cecilia's absence have softened in the months since she passed. Still, Aster can't help but be conscious of the lack of laughter in the mornings, miss the teasing and the way Cecilia would hit her with her pillow to wake her up.

She sets her pencil down and carefully swallows the grief that rises in her throat. Cecilia would no doubt be flattered that Aster misses her so much, then feel bad for causing Aster so much pain.

Aster bows her head. The memory of Cecilia's hugs, the big bear ones that always managed to lift Aster off her feet, brings

a fresh wave of longing. What she would give to hug her best friend again, Aster thinks.

An insistent meow draws her out of her thoughts. Tangerine, now awake and therefore hungry, pads over to her chair and looks up at her expectantly. He paws at her ankle when she immediately doesn't move to fill his food bowl.

"Okay okay, I'm going," Aster huffs fondly. She reaches down to scratch his ears before unfolding herself from the chair. Tangerine had been Cecilia's addition to their apartment—*can't let you and your plant army have all the fun*, she had claimed. His name had also been her fault: Tangerine is a grey tabby with pretty green eyes.

*You shouldn't hold Sober Cecilia to the actions of Drunk Cecilia*, Aster had been informed archly when she'd questioned the decision. But they'd stuck with the name anyways, because Cecilia was too lazy to come up with something else and Aster had secretly thought it was kind of cute.

Aster watches Tangerine tuck into his food. It's been a while since she last felt up to make herself food—and today feels like as good a day as any to step into the kitchen instead of ordering takeout again.

But what to make... Aster purses her lips. She hasn't had her first meal of the day yet—a breakfast food, then. The pantry and refrigerator are depressingly empty (an unfortunate result of having always been unwilling to go grocery shopping unless accompanied by a friend)—it's something she should remedy soon. She pokes her head into the pantry. Cecilia had insisted on buying the giant twenty-five-pound bag of flour and a truly

ridiculous number of yeast packets the week before the accident happened, so a bread should be well within Aster's capabilities today.

Cecilia's pear-and-walnut focaccia recipe is still tacked to the corkboard above the kitchen counter. It's quite easy to make, and the pantry is still well-stocked with dry ingredients. The yeast, water, sugar, and flour are combined in no time at all.

While she waits, Aster retrieves a few pears and an orange from the fruit bowl on the kitchen table. She peels the orange and pops the pieces into her mouth while the sponge rests, watches Tangerine lap daintily at his water bowl before curling up in the big vintage armchair in the living room. The two-bedroom apartment has felt rather empty without another person brewing coffee in the mornings and running the shower at night. Aster is grateful for Tangerine, for his affectionate purring and the gentle way he eases her loneliness by just sharing the same space as her.

The dough comes together nicely in the stand mixer. Before long, there's not much else to do but cover the dough with a cloth and wait for it to rise.

Before the accident, Aster would perch herself on a countertop and watch Cecilia bustle around the kitchen making some elaborate breakfast spread or a complicated-looking dish for dinner. The inherent boredom of wait times was easily solved by curling up on the sofa with the latest episode of whatever show they were watching at the moment, timer set to go off when the cake or chicken or stew was done. Aster would provide commentary, and Cecilia would laugh or elbow her in the ribs accordingly.

Aster can't help but be acutely aware of the quiet that blankets the apartment now. Maybe she should play some music, she muses. But she would hate to disturb Tangerine's nap. Instead, she returns to her daily crossword. Truthfully, she hasn't finished one in several weeks—Cecilia, the English major she was, knew all the hard words.

The timer on her phone chimes. Damn. She's on the last word for today. Forty-eight across, "comics cry of dismay". Aster frowns. Cecilia's absence aches in her chest.

On the bright side, the focaccia dough has risen quite beautifully. Aster turns it onto a pan and presses careful indentations into it, tries to mimic the artful way Cecilia would arrange the pears and walnuts. She doesn't quite manage it, but she thinks Cecilia would be proud of her anyways.

Tangerine comes weaving around her ankles as she takes her finished focaccia out of the oven twenty-five minutes later. He turns his nose up at the fragrant smell of freshly-baked bread and sweet pear—Aster forgives him for his transgressions against her precious focaccia immediately, though, and scoops him up to drop kisses on his forehead and face while it cools.

She ends up curling up in the big armchair to enjoy the product of her morning's hard work. For some reason, the familiar, slightly-sweet taste of the bread brings tears to her eyes.

It's delicious, but Aster knows it will never be quite as good as Cecilia's.

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# Frogaccia

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"I'm going to bed," Tessa declared as she dropped her spellbook and garden tools in the doorway. "Before you even say anything, I don't care what time it is, I've had enough of today and I'm over it."

Aveline watched on in stunned silence as the auburn-haired witch stomped past the kitchen, down the hallway to the bedroom and slammed the door. There was a loud crash within like something being thrown across the room. The taller woman hurried down the corridor and tried the doorknob, but it was locked.

"Tessa, sweetheart, what happened?" she asked, her ear pressed gingerly to the wooden door between them. "Did that goblin get into your garden again? I can hex it if you want. You know that's my specialty." She cracked a smile hoping the playful tone would draw her love out.

At first, there was only silence, but soon enough the soft sounds of muffled sobs drifted from within. Aveline pressed her forehead to the door and tried to appeal to the woman again. "I don't know what happened, but you know I love you. I will be out in the kitchen when you're ready."

She stood outside the door a moment longer before finally making her way back to the kitchen. Tessa's large recipe book sat on its usual pedestal near the open window. Being a Green witch, Aveline often found her love elbow deep in the earth,

growing whatever she needed for her potions in their small garden. Her gift also brought a great love of baking, and Aveline would watch with wide-eyed wonder as Tessa tied back her chestnut tresses and created wondrous and delicious things whenever she stepped foot behind the counter.

"I need to do something for her," she said, tapping her cheek thoughtfully. A low croak from the window startled her from her musing. Tessa's frog familiar Tobias watched her from his perch on the windowsill. They watched each other curiously, and before she could react, the toad leapt forward, catching the cookbook awkwardly and both tumbled to the floor.

"Oh cherry pits!" She scooped up the book, the frog safely nestled underneath its open pages. "Tobias... you old toad, how many times have I told you about not climbing up there, just look at the mess you made! Tessa's had a bad day; I'll not have you adding to it."

She turned to place the tome to its proper spot when her eye caught the page the familiar had opened it to. It was a fairly simple recipe compared to the others she had seen her love make. Even with her limited knowledge of the kitchen, surely, she could manage this.

"I think I can forgive you this time sir," Aveline smiled and planted a kiss on the toad as she placed him on the counter beside her. "You just gave me a wonderful idea."

Rolling up her sleeves, Aveline gathered all her ingredients and a large bowl.

"Flour, honey, salt. Let's see... first, we gotta mix the yeast in warm water."

Tobias cautiously crawled across the counter as he watched her dump the ingredients into the large bowl.

"Nuh-uh! Not today sir, you've made enough of a mess thank you." She scooped the frog up and placed him on the stool beside her. He puffed up and squeaked angrily. "I'll have none of that!" She poked the amphibian's head. "Behave." They stared each other down, until the familiar looked away sheepishly. "Now then..." Aveline ran her finger down the page to where she left off. "Ah yes, then add the olive oil, salt and gradually add the flour."

She placed the bowl with the remaining portion of flour down beside her and began to mix. Casting a glance down the silent hallway, Aveline frowned. "I hope this works."

Turning her attention back to her bowls, she had no time to react as Tobias saw his opportunity to dive into the flour bowl. A thick cloud of white wafted out across the kitchen, leaving everything in its wake with a delicate coating of white.

“Oh, Tobias! Look what you did!” the Hex Witch sighed. “Tessa is going to have a fit if we don’t clean this up.”

The familiar looked up at her remorsefully. A giggle bubbled up in Aveline’s throat at the sight of him. The toad was covered head to toe in the white flour.

“I must say sir, you make quite the loaf of bread yourself.”

She gathered up her mischievous companion and carried him over to the sink. “Let’s get you cleaned up.”

Aveline stared at the puffy lump that laid beneath the damp towel. It had nearly doubled in size now, just as the recipe had said. “Well, will you look at that Tobi,” the Hex Witch said proudly. “Maybe I do know my way around the kitchen after all.”

Tobias croaked happily from his new perch on the witch’s shoulder.

“I’m glad you approve sir.” Aveline laughed as she scratched the toad under his chin affectionately. “Now we just gotta shape it and let it rest another twenty minutes and then it’ll be ready for the oven.”

She rolled the dough ball onto the counter and began to fold it gently into itself. Tobias hopped from her shoulder and eyed her work carefully. Once she was satisfied with her work, she laid the damp cloth over it once again. The frog laid a tentative hand on the moist cloth and looked up at her expectantly.

“Do you think I should?” Aveline worried her lip with her teeth, “You know what Tess says about using my spells in the kitchen...”

Tobias croaked and pressed its other hand on the fabric expectantly.

“I suppose a small one won’t hurt.” The Hex Witch leaned close to the fabric and shut her eyes. “Agan ferhþlufu!*” she whispered. The cloth shimmered then faded. “There, I think we’re good to go.” She smiled brightly as she revealed the rerisen dough to her cooking partner. Tobias croaked happily beside her as she sprinkled the fresh rosemary she had retrieved

from Tessa's garden and placed the tray of seasoned dough in the oven.

—

It had been a very long day. Bad omens seemed to follow her everywhere. The owl that sat at her window this morning, the red and white flowers that bloomed on the path to the market. All signs pointed to a poor day. She had done her best to counter them, but the four-leaf clover she kept sewn in her apron did little to improve her luck. It wasn't until she had tripped and ripped her favorite leggings that Aveline had gifted her that she knew her day needed a redo. Dropping her bags at the door she had rushed past her sweetheart before the other witch could see the state she was in. Locking the door behind her she leaned against the frame and sighed. The framed picture that hung beside their bed fell to the floor with a crash. It was too much. Tessa flung herself on the bed and sobbed. She wasn't sure how long she had laid there; she vaguely recalled Aveline coming to the door some time ago, but the hallway had been silent ever since.

Quietly, she crept through the dark corridor that led to the kitchen.

"Tobiaaaas! What happened?!" Aveline wailed. "This doesn't look like the recipe at all!"

Tessa poked her head around the corner. The kitchen was a disaster. There were bowls and towels and utensils strewn about the counter, and everything and everyone in the kitchen was covered in a dusting of white. Aveline had her back to her, hiding whatever she was trying to make from her vision. Curiosity got the better of her as she tiptoed closer. Tobias the Clever saw her first and hopped to his Mistress excitedly.

“What’s going on in here?” she asked playfully as the frog jumped into her arms.

“Tessa!” Aveline whipped around to face her. “I was going to clean up my mess I swear!”

“From the look of it, you had a lot of help making it,” she laughed as she wiped some of the powder from her lover’s cheek. Flour, she noted.

“We wanted to make you something, to make you feel better.” The taller woman blushed. “But don’t look at it! I think he jinxed it when he jumped in the bowl! I knew I should’ve used new

flour. This is what I get for trying to bake. I should just stick to something I'm good at."

Her love was getting more worked up the longer she prattled. Finally, she moved aside to reveal their creation. On the counter sat a loaf of bread, or so she thought. The longer she looked at it the more it looked like her amphibious familiar. She looked over at her open cookbook and saw the recipe her dear one had tried to recreate. Emotions bubbled up from within and she could not stop the flow of tears that followed.

"Oh no oh no! Cherry pits! I ruined everything," Aveline exclaimed worriedly. "I wanted to make you smile not cry!"

Tessa spun on her heel and yanked the woman down to plant a chaste kiss on her lips, silencing her rambles.

"You loveable imp, you didn't ruin it..." the Green Witch laughed. "You made Frogaccia Bread."

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# $3 \times 10^8$ m/s

**cloak/zb**
Twitter: CloakShadow26, breadopoems

hey, what does the speed of light taste like to you?
in the flashes of memory as my teeth
meet soft home-made dough,
let me tell you my answer

marble buns aren't just marble buns,
because they come from the town of culture and memory.
at least they did whenever i'd eat them
all those years ago -
before i moved house, went to school, and grew up
and overrode my childhood save data
with a shiny new language.
and whether we pick chocolate
or custard
from a nearer branch now,
i remember.

i remember the local shopping village,
its grocer, its newsagent, its bakery
those now-blurry viet words tossed between
my parents and the baker,
with me as the piggy, struggling in the middle.
and once that bakery was not-so-local,
lucky were we to find an equally close store,
with equally viet bakers,
and equally delicious bánh mì,
and all the smells and sounds of freshly toasted loaves.

ah, it felt like only the other day when
i stood stranded by a certain B*ker's Del*ght,
forsaken by public transport,
waiting...
and staring
(just as longingly as usual)
at the curves of their sourdough,
the regal wall of block loaves,
their snackable round roll mountain-
but between my schedule and the world's,
i've still yet to try any,
so i suppose i'm still waiting.

and i can't wait to revisit my favourite of all;
a bakery endorsed by a friend, and i
always endorse in turn.
as always i'll insist some friend to come with
and give in to the temptation of my usual selection
and revel in the softness
the sweetness
of the cookie-covered bun that stole my heart
on that one family trip that feels
like eons ago.

and so, i think, the speed of light
(imbued with 400g of flour and a spoon or so of salt)
seems bittersweet at first
but think on it more and you'll see it's just sweet:
like the way my floury hands combined the dough,
the hands of life have combined my past.
and the culinary culmination of it all-
the hunger, the memories, the longing?

this half-eaten sourdough loaf in my hands

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minki
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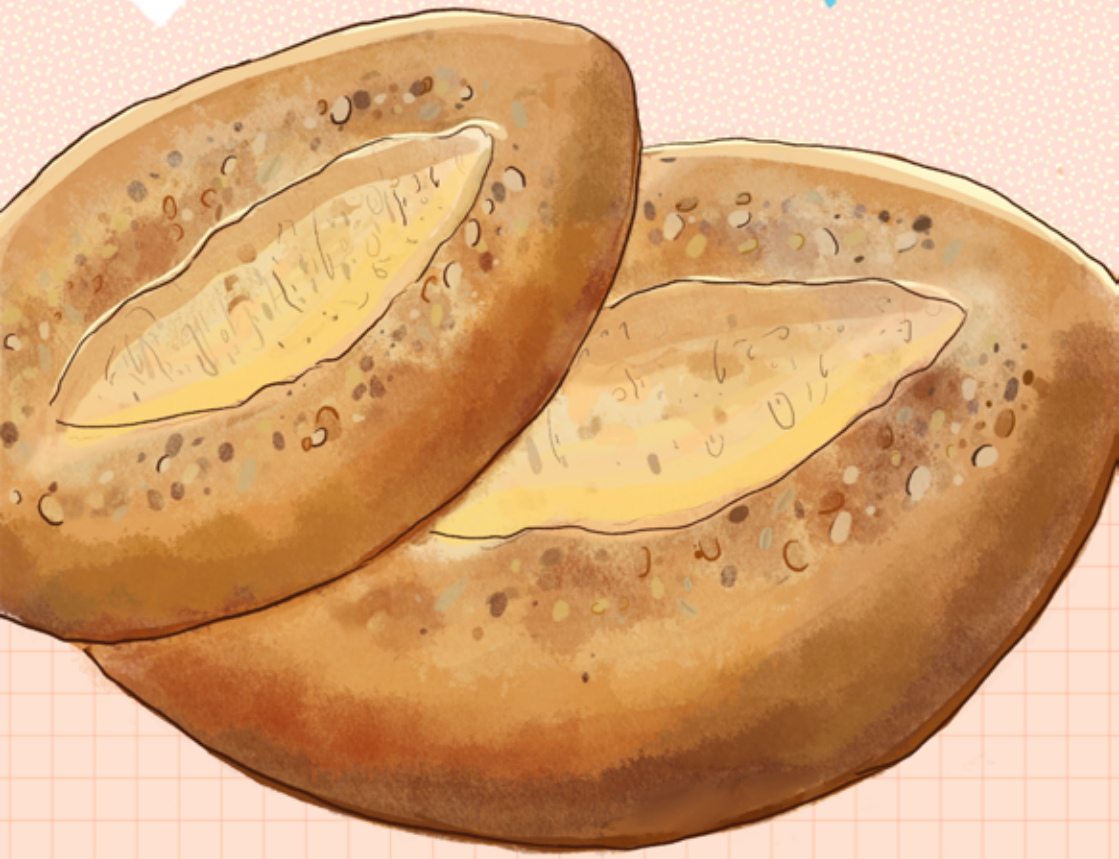
# Baker's Delight

## ～イタズラな猫ものがたり～

# pão francês

/bɾɛd/ noun



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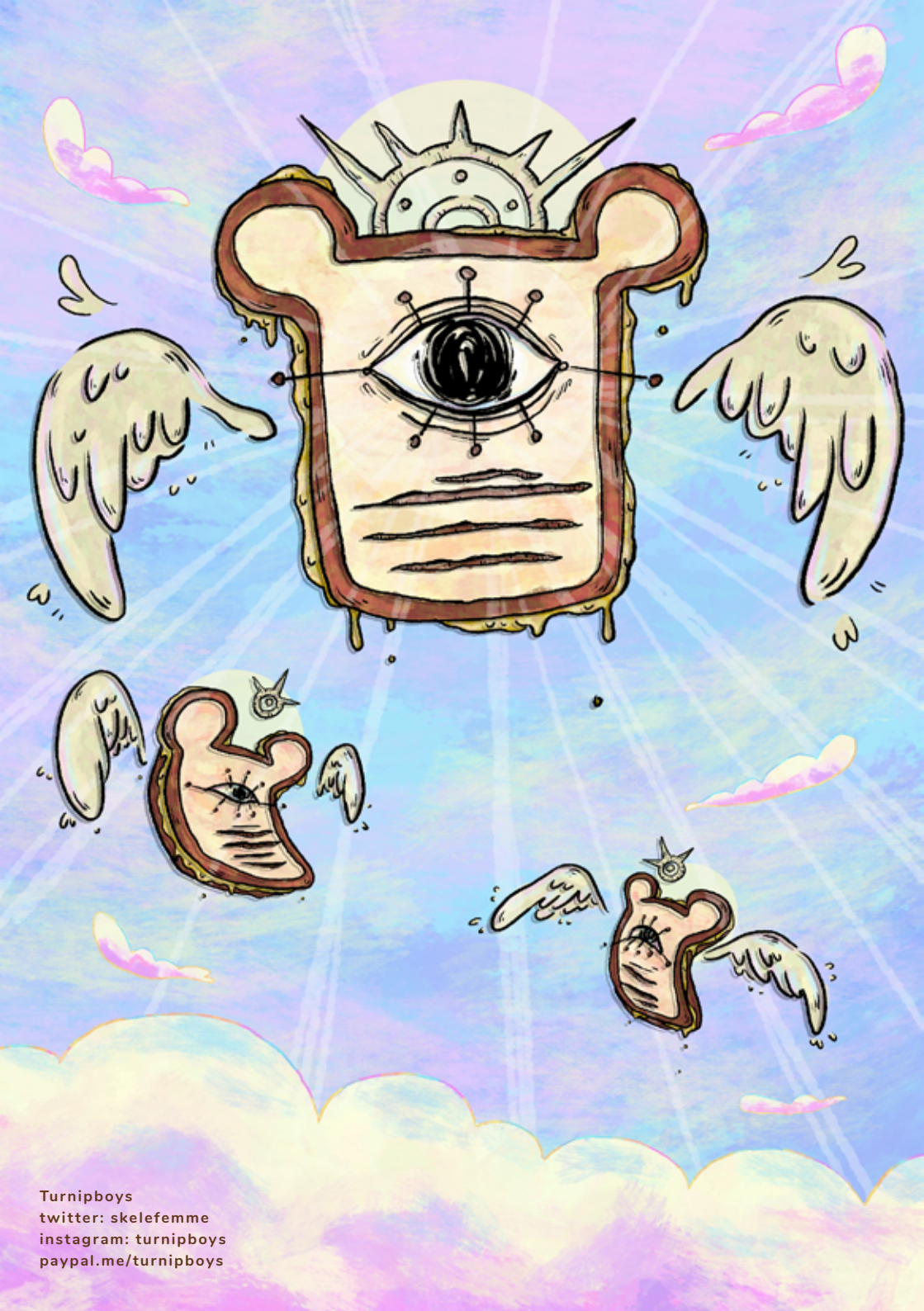

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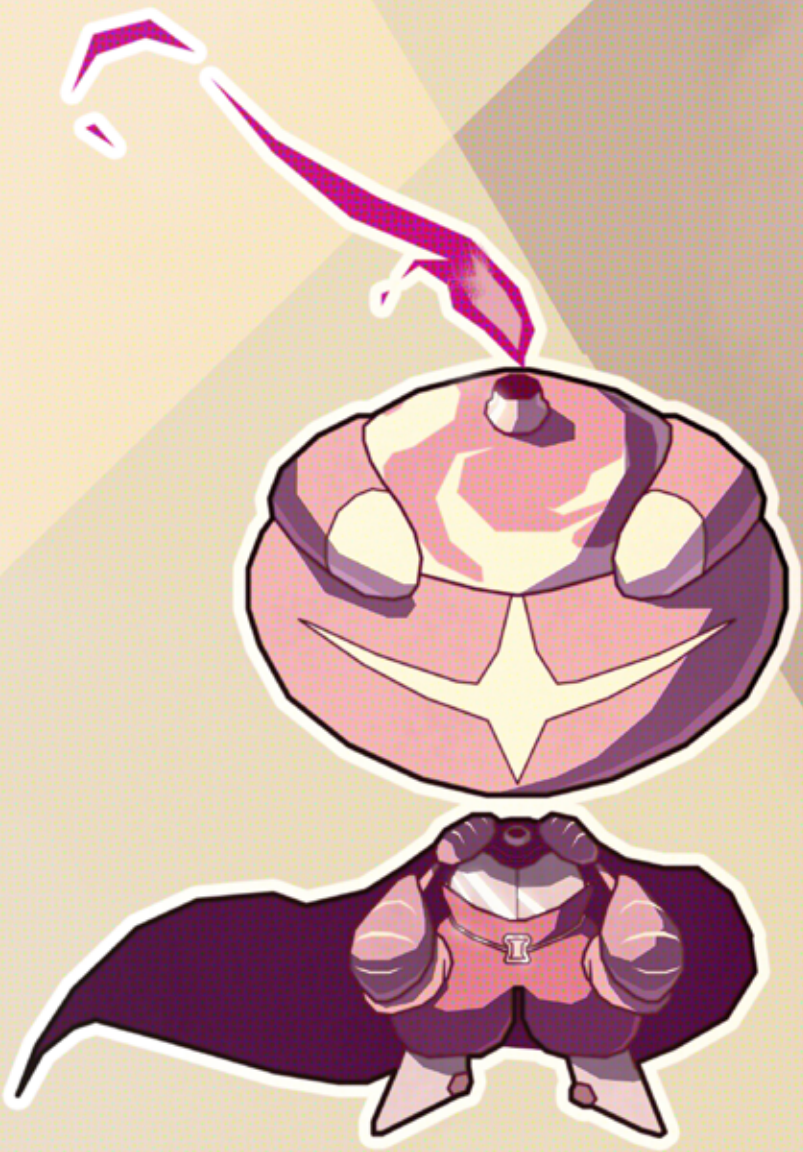

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# Bread Park

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The cacophony of cicadas pierced the summer afternoon. It was humid enough out to make one tire and daydream about sleeping. The amusement park was empty today, save for the owner and his daughter. It was a holiday for them. A day to be together. That's how grand it felt.

The creaky sound of shoes walking across wooden bridges sounded throughout the open air. Out in the cages with large spaces of lush grass and exotic trees, animals were perking their heads up attentively. They were not ordinary animals either. They were bread creatures that were primarily shaped after dinosaurs, a general idea of sorts.

A large triceratops with flesh made of golden and toasty bread walked slowly to the edges of the bridge. It reared its head up, nudging the wooden railing.

"Riley!"

A frantic dad extended his hand out, afraid of the sight he was witnessing. Riley perched on the railing, kicking her legs out in careless ease as she looked up at the bright, sunny sky while blowing a pink bubble. When it popped, she took her eyes away and looked over at her father, Chester. Her face was passive, unbothered, and uncaring.

Yet as she looked back down at where her father's fear came from, she saluted at the dinosaur with two fingers and hopped down while blowing another bubble.

She bounced when she reached the floor, popping her bubble and placing her hands inside her pockets. She realized she was sitting on an informative mat that read:

> **Did you know?**
> *Our bread friends are very friendly since they do not have any predatory instincts! (Please do not pet.)*

"I'm okay, dad."

Despite the lack of urgency of Riley's safety, her father rushed up to her and hugged her tightly as if he hadn't seen her in years. "I know, but you never know!" He swayed her with overly doting father reactions, and Riley rolled her eyes but patted him on the back for comfort. "Ight, I won't do it again, okay?"

Chester lets her go and lets out a hearty laugh. "I trust you, kiddo!"

Her father looked out to the exhibit with such pride, placing his hand on his hip while his other arm was wrapped around her. She took out her phone, searching for the camera, and took a picture of the doughy creature.

"They can't be out too long today, so let's just have a quick, fun rundown of the place, ya?"

The park had short service hours and their exhibits had special equipment inside them to keep the dinosaur-like creatures alive during them. Though the exhibits looked natural, if one were to really look at the details then it would break the illusion of them.

There were low hums, shifts in the trees and high-pitch squawks above that filled their ears. Riley passed her fingers through the

wooden bars of the fences she passed as she watched several bread dinosaurs graze and look curiously.

They were still amongst the herbivore exhibits. Bread Styracosauruses lifted their heads and stomped around, using their horns to tap against one another's. Crumbs fell to the ground. Little ones trotted to their hideouts under bushes and ditches, making a mess of themselves. Two bread Brontosauruses amused themselves by a pond. Their rock-solid bodies like burnt toast cautiously patted the water.

Riley came across one of the informative mats, scanned her eyes to read, and blew out a bubble.

**Did you know?**
*Since our bread buddies were not living animals, we've installed a voice box into their doughy throats to give them that dinosaur feel!*

Riley popped her bubble, blinked, and looked up at her father. "Did you guys have to watch a lot of dinosaur movies to get good recordings? I read somewhere that dinosaur noises we hear aren't even what they really sounded like."

Chester crouched down to a squat with her without removing an inch of his smile. "Perhaps. But the kiddos won't know the difference." He winked, and she rolled her eyes. "Yeah, but I notice, dad."

"And what a smart daughter I have!"

The two continued onward. Riley kept her hands in her pocket, rubbing her thumb over her phone anxiously but remained focused on what seemed to be her father's greatest achievement.

She had questions on her mind, but they were usually answered with the little notes scattered around the park. They walked into the building where animatronics were used to demonstrate how these animals were created.

In front of the first panels, Riley looked up at a giant loaf of bread. Just an astonishingly large-scale model of one. Riley looked down at the information mat.

> **Did you know?**
> *We make our bread creations with leavened bread! We have a special oven that we put them through while inserting all the ingredents into them that makes them come alive! . . .*

It was a long informative mat, and Riley's eyes couldn't even scan all the ingredients and progress. She couldn't help but think how these informative bubbles were just plain corny too. When she lifted her head up, the room seemed like it extended forever.

Once they finished with that building, Riley could've sworn that her mood descended from an overload of information.

"Come on, this way!"

Her father dashed ahead, pointing out towards an open-ended area. Riley followed after him, and the closer she got, the more she could see out into the field. There was a transportation area with two safari cars stationed side by side. With no one to escort them in for a tour, Chester sat in the driver's seat and waved back at her.

She looked out, thinking to herself how could her father afford so much land for childish animals. She then looked at a rules sign which was quite hefty in length. One of the rules read, 'do

not pet the breadsaurs!' Another one said, 'do not get into the vehicle without a supervisor!' The last one said, 'Do not get out of the vehicle without your trusty guide!'

Riley jutted her thumb towards the sign, "Hey, pops, do you really think this is a good idea?"

Chester stuck his head out like a dog. "It wouldn't be much of a tour if you only saw half of the park, my sweet angel!"

Riley sluggishly moved towards the car, popped it open, and hopped inside. Once seated, her father quickly got the car rolling.

"The ones out front are the friendlier type, so we thought it would be good for the guests to see those than the ones out here," Chester said while extending out his hand in a grandiose fashion towards the large exhibit.

It didn't take long for them to encounter the first patch of dinosaurs. Though they were large, the sounds of their steps were minuscule. Their doughy footsteps were light, even their prints were hardly staple.

Without realizing where the car was going, there was a sudden sound of a little one shrieking and rushing off away from the car. The two gasped, and Riley rose herself up to scout for other bread animals near the car. Apparently, Chester nearly ran into that one in particular.

"Should I be on the lookout while you drive?" She looked down at her father who shook his head like a loyal boy scout in trouble. "Nope, nope, I got it all taken care of."

The bumpy road made it hard to take pictures, but it was still nice to see them pass. A few of them would try to run up to the

car but their bodies would just lightly tip the car and nothing more. Even with more force, they were not able to flip the car over.

Riley smiled as she watched them pass by but made sure to not extend her hand out to them.

It wasn't long before little raptor-like bread creatures came along. They scrambled after the car; their voice boxes sounded a little disoriented, which made them sound eerie. Riley leaned out and watched them try to run after them. They were not very fast, barely even able to reach the car, but they also hopped, and one of them managed to get up onto the car.

It thumped along the roof, which would've been intimidating if it weren't bread. Crumbs even fell from the car. Chester looked up, beating his fist against the ceiling.

"Drat, I didn't think they could actually jump that high."

"Are we okay?"

"They're harmless."

It kept knocking about above them, so Chester jerked and swerved the car slightly to get it to jump off. Eventually, it did, and a piece of its toe snapped off. The creature didn't even notice its missing toe.

"Will it be okay?"

"Absolutely, my dear."

Chester drove more carefully. He darted his eyes in every which way, checking the rear-view mirror and taking quick glances at

his surroundings. The road was no longer as bumpy as before so Riley was able to snap some shots.

They eventually stopped in the middle of the field, where Riley climbed out of the car and took selfies. There were different types of creatures lurking around in the tall grass, behind trees, and near the waterfall.

Riley climbed up onto the rocks, posing herself up for more pictures until she saw a sign that says to not try to feed the breadsaurs.

“Hey, dad, is it okay to walk around out here? Do y’all normally just stay in the car?”

Chester was tangled in his seatbelt, fumbling to get out of the car. Riley put her hands on her hips and shook her head. She walked over to him but as she walked away, a shadow loomed over hers, swallowing up her shadow. When she looked down to see why suddenly there was shade over her, she noticed the outline of a T-Rex.

She had a mixture of emotions wash over her. She turned around slowly with the utmost care. Her head tilted up, looking at the enormous creature. Her breath caught in her throat. It was goofy looking but still horribly tall.

Riley felt a sudden jerk away. Her father had grabbed her by the arm, and they fled behind the car. Before Riley could speak, Chester raised a finger to his lips to silence the both of them.

“Is it really that dangerous, dad?”

“I don’t know.”

“What about the sign up front about their instincts?”

“Well, I’m sure someone knows but I don’t know.”

“Dad!”

The bread t-rex noticed their movement and dipped its head over to it. Out of reflex, Riley swatted at the snout of it. It wasn’t a hard smack but it caused the dinosaur to sneeze. It knocked Chester back while Riley held tightly on the car door.

Riley started to walk back, watching the dinosaur peeking its head forward. She nearly screamed but was cut off as the creature nipped at her clothes.

“Riley!” Chester reached out to get her but was only able to get her foot. The dinosaur tugged her hard enough that Chester was only left with her shoe.

“Dad!” She yelled after him as the breadsaur pulled her into the air. She struggled against it and eventually, the creature flings her up into the air. She screams and extends her arms around as she falls back down to Earth.

Her father watches in horror, trying to think of something as he searched the car. But much to both of their surprise, the dinosaur didn’t even open its mouth to eat her. She instead fell onto its head. It lets out a small groan and looks quite amused. It bobbed its head happily with her on top.

Riley tried to remain calm as she held onto it, laughing nervously after realizing that she just might not be in danger.

Chester looked up at her, cautious and wondering what the dinosaur would do next. But it didn’t do anything. It just continued to bob its head like it was cheerful of its new friend on its head.

He laughed with her now. Then they both began to laugh more joyously. “What a silly thing!” Riley called out, patting the top of its head. The t-rex groaned in cheery response.

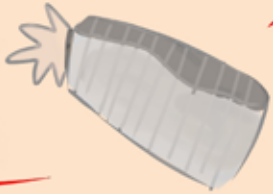
Riley laid down on its enormous head and raised her phone up in the air, putting a peace sign over her eyes. “Say Cheese!”

The camera had a view of her, the head of the dinosaur, and her father awkwardly waving up for the picture. When it flashed, she looked it over and laughed, blowing one more bubble. Nothing could beat that.

# Taste the slice of life-

# -With Milk Bread!

Milk Bread is a feathery and light bread with a buttery taste and is essential in all manner of sweet dishes. It is easy to make at home too, and will be something that the whole family can enjoy!



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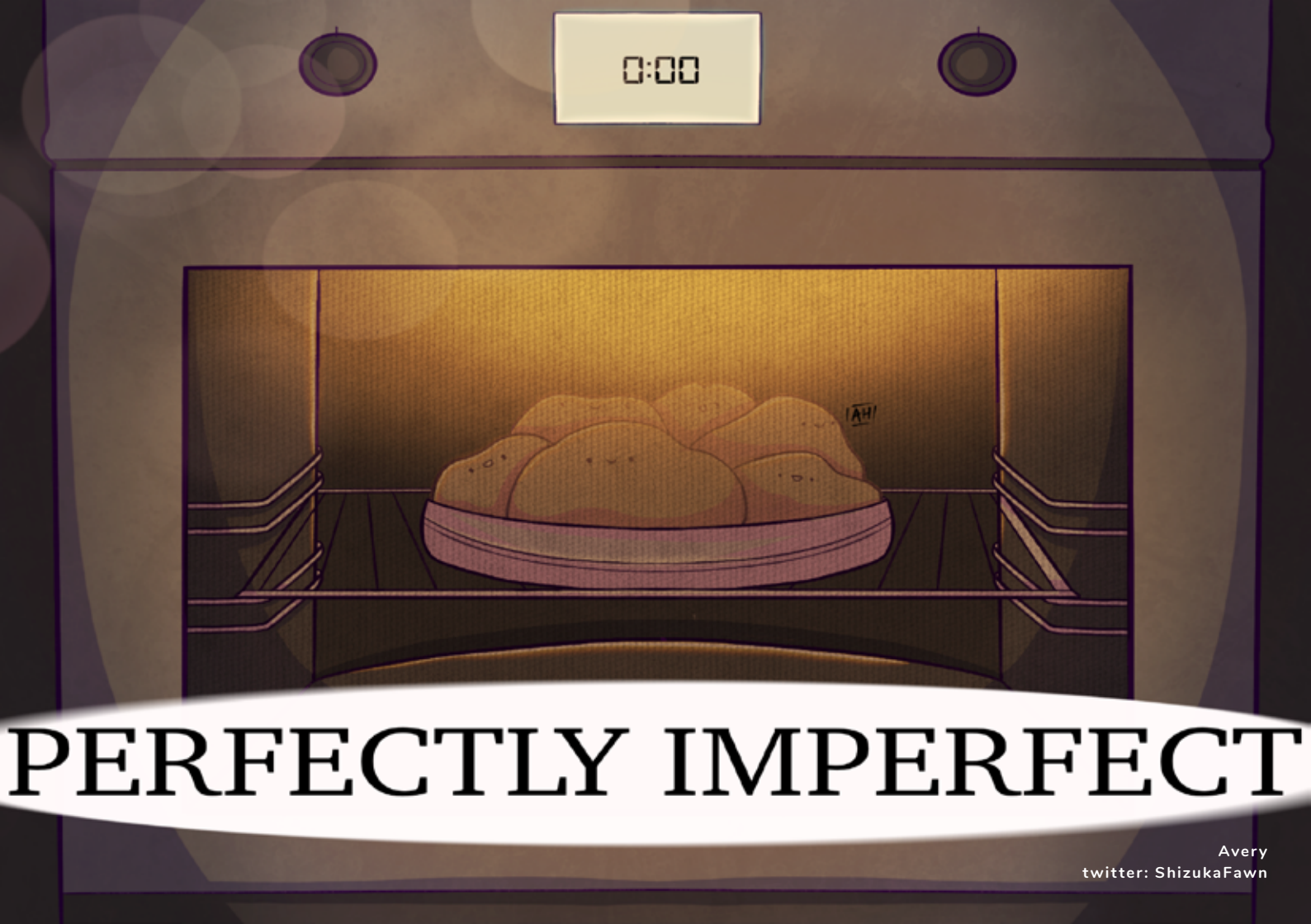


# PERFECTLY IMPERFECT

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# A Few Quiet Hours

**frankie**

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Letty wakes at the crack of dawn to start her orders for the day. She rises on the right side of her four-poster, queen-sized bed, the sky dark through the gossamer white curtains shrouding the windows of her second-floor apartment. Arms stretch high to the roof, a gentle pat to the button on top of her clock to silence it, then Letty swings her legs off the bed, toes touching down on the cold hardwood. The hem of her nightgown brushes against her ankles as she ambles into the washroom along with a purring white cat with brown paws; the only company she bothers to keep nowadays.

The world is completely silent every morning, just like this. Letty keeps the lights down deliberately as she brushes her teeth, splashes cool water on her face, and changes into simple clothing. She completes her look by blotting Chanel “La vie en rose” on her lips with her middle finger and tying her hair back with a red ribbon. Letty will see no one, but the splashes of bright red always make her feel more alive. She heads into the kitchen and snaps her fingers to raise the lights.

Letty’s kitchen has evolved over her years in Paris; where there was once plaster splashback is now white subway tile and beige-tiled counters were replaced with glittering black marble. She kept the two wrought-iron chairs and garden table in the nook because she couldn’t bear to part with them along with James, the wood fire oven at the end of the kitchen silent and cold. The windows start to turn a dark grey as the sun rises, and though she knows that it is absolutely not the case, Letty

still feels like she's the only conscious person in the whole city as she starts her orders.

Her whispered incantations float soft in the air, with the cat swiping at the powdery clouds and viscous streams of ingredients that follow her instructions, flowing from their respective containers and into various bowls which have placed themselves on the counter. Letty has been doing this long enough where she's able to make different doughs at once, long enough where she doesn't have to worry about measuring exactly, about over-seasoning some of the more complex mixtures. So, as the ingredients combine themselves into shapely mounds of dough and are left to rise, Letty moves around to the back of the oven and sits on a little stool in front of the hearth.

The fire is the trickiest part, no doubt—finicky and volatile in nature, always wild when she attempts to enchant it. James had always been better at it, but she'd taught Letty enough to decently make the fire. It's the only thing she thinks she truly labors over, chest drawn down towards her knees as she scrunches forward and squints at the embers as they fizzle and burn the wood. Letty feeds it willow branches and whispers more magical words at it. After thirty minutes, she dabs at her forehead and upper lip carefully with a cotton handkerchief, the fire crackling merrily under her tender encouragement.

It's then that she comes up to the counter and pokes a finger in each of her doughs to see how they feel. They're springy to the touch, still soft, so she starts to knead them lightly with bare hands tingly with raw magic, whispering her intent into each starter special for each of her clients—to promote good health, restful, dreamless sleep, to imbibe the consumer with an extra boost of peppiness, to boost the consumer's prosperity and luck for a few golden hours.

Flour dusts the air as Letty finishes her incantations and plops the finished dough into several loaf pans. She scores them like James used to. James was always much better at this too, cleaner and prettier, but Letty doesn't want to change it up, wants to cling to the things they used to do so differently, to the things they used to do together despite the difference. Once the breads are on a pan holder in the furnace, she starts her tea and warms her own slice of day-old bread by placing it on a high shelf inside the furnace for two minutes.

By the time her tea is done, Letty pours it carefully, leaving flour-y, white fingerprints on the teapot's surface. She takes her bread and tea to the window where the garden set is, pulls out the chair, and watches the sun rise out of the window as she eats the things that she made for herself to cure the ache of being alone. The cat bats at her ankles, eventually climbing up to the table to lay in the beam of orange-pink sunlight that shines over Letty's little table.

The aroma from the oven is warm and comforting, air crackling with slowly-forming bread crusts, and Letty breathes it all in with a sigh. She still has a few more orders to complete before her clients' familiars start to come by the window, so she takes another bite of her bread, another sip of tea, and pets the cat before rising and turning to the kitchen island.

She says more words into the air and imagines the way James used to say her name over and over again to get her back to work.

*Letitia, Letitia, Letitia.*

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# Limerick Sandwich

Chef Mari
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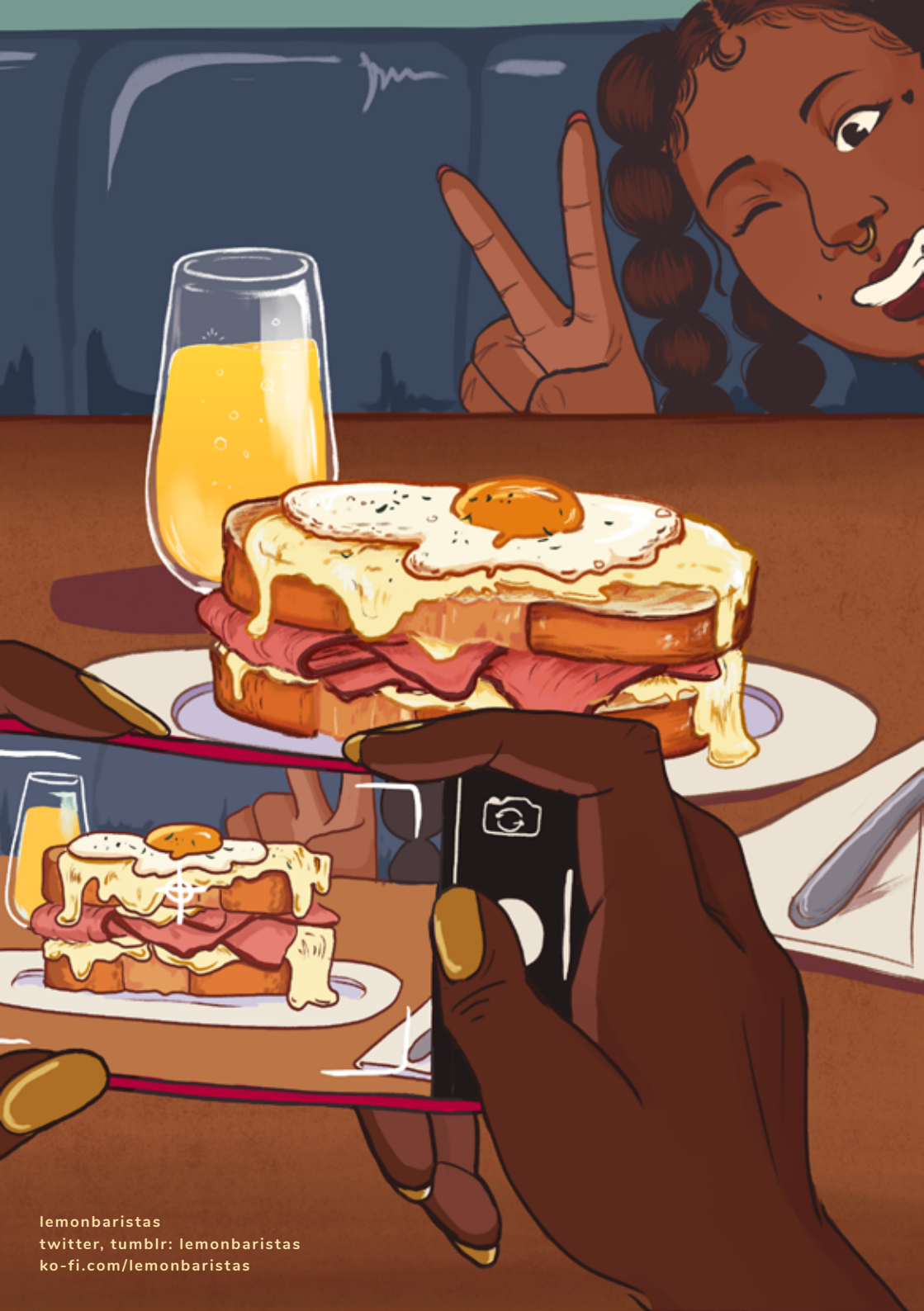
Total time: 5-10 minutes | Makes 4 finger sandwiches

## Ingredients:

- 2 slices of Bread
- 14.2 g (1 tbsp) Softened Butter
- 120 g (1 cup) Cucumber
- 46 g (3 tbsp) Cream Cheese
- Optional- 26 g (¼ cup) Scallions

## Directions:

1. Spread half of the butter on one side of each slice of bread. Toast this side on a hot pan until slightly crisp.
2. Spread half of the cream cheese on the unbuttered side of each bread.
3. (Optional) Thinly slice the scallions and arrange them in a narrow border, about 2 scallion slices wide, along the bread's crust.
4. Thinly slice your cucumber and arrange them over the cream cheese on one slice of bread. Allow the cucumbers to overlap and completely cover any gaps.
5. Place the other bread slice on top of the cucumbers, cream cheese side down.
6. Press the sandwich top to seal and cut into 4 equal pieces.
7. Enjoy cold alongside your favorite hot beverage (traditionally tea).



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# Larz the Baker

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The sun threads red streamers over the horizon, seeping along sleepy streets and shuttered windows. The birds do not yet call out the morning, but Larz already stands in his kitchen, counting out each flake of flour as it drops into the bowl on the scale.

It must be the precise amount and it must be the precise temperature and here, now, in the warm hiss of dissipating fog and burning dew, here is the place and time when the world holds its breath, when the temperature is just right, when everything stills for this careful work.

A fine dust fills the air. Larz breathes in the aroma of the flour.

Even the water must be perfect. Perfect temperature, perfect amount. No hotter or colder than necessary.

The world inhales and so does Larz, one held breath that traps this moment.

He does not let it out. The morning stills. The dew does not burn. A perfect, frozen instant lingers as he digs his hands into the bowl of flour and water. It has to be done by hand. He must feel every flake, ensure these two simple ingredients mix in just the right way. No tool can perform the task. Only human hands are sensitive enough to find each and every bit of flour that clings to the edges of the bowl.

When the day begins, people will come to this bakery. They will get their sandwich loaves, their croissants, their sourdough and baguettes and brioche. And they will ask, as they do every day, “How?”

How does Larz create his bread? How does each loaf turn out just right? There is no waste, no duds tossed in the trash. How does he produce so much and so precisely and so quickly every day, just one man in one bakery in one little town?

The secret is here, in this held breath, this perfect moment. As birds pause mid-flight, as the sun ceases its climbing, as bees’ wings freeze, Larz kneads and stretches, working the dough. Only that dough still thrums with life; only the bread still moves and shifts.

He listens with his hands until it is just right, until it is perfect. Then he sets it aside and begins the next.

Each loaf is like this, a perfect, growing thing, carefully nurtured. Larz listens to each and every one until he hears their heartbeat in his fingers.

The sun rises in ticks, in the breaths Larz lets out between loaves. Soon, rising dough sits nestled in a warm corner of the bakery. Other loaves are already baking, but these new ones will join them when they’ve ceased growing, when they are perfectly, precisely ready.

Until then, Larz exhales, letting the sun rise, letting those loaves crackle and shift. Time is necessary. Time, water, flour. The simplest of ingredients.

“How?” they ask when he switches the sign from CLOSED to OPEN and the town arrives at his bakery.

Sleep still clings to their eyes and glows in their cheeks, but Larz was up before the sun, holding the world in place while he did his work. One quiet, slow moment. Three simple ingredients. Not a secret, just a little time and care.

Larz simply shrugs, breathing deeply of the creeping morning.

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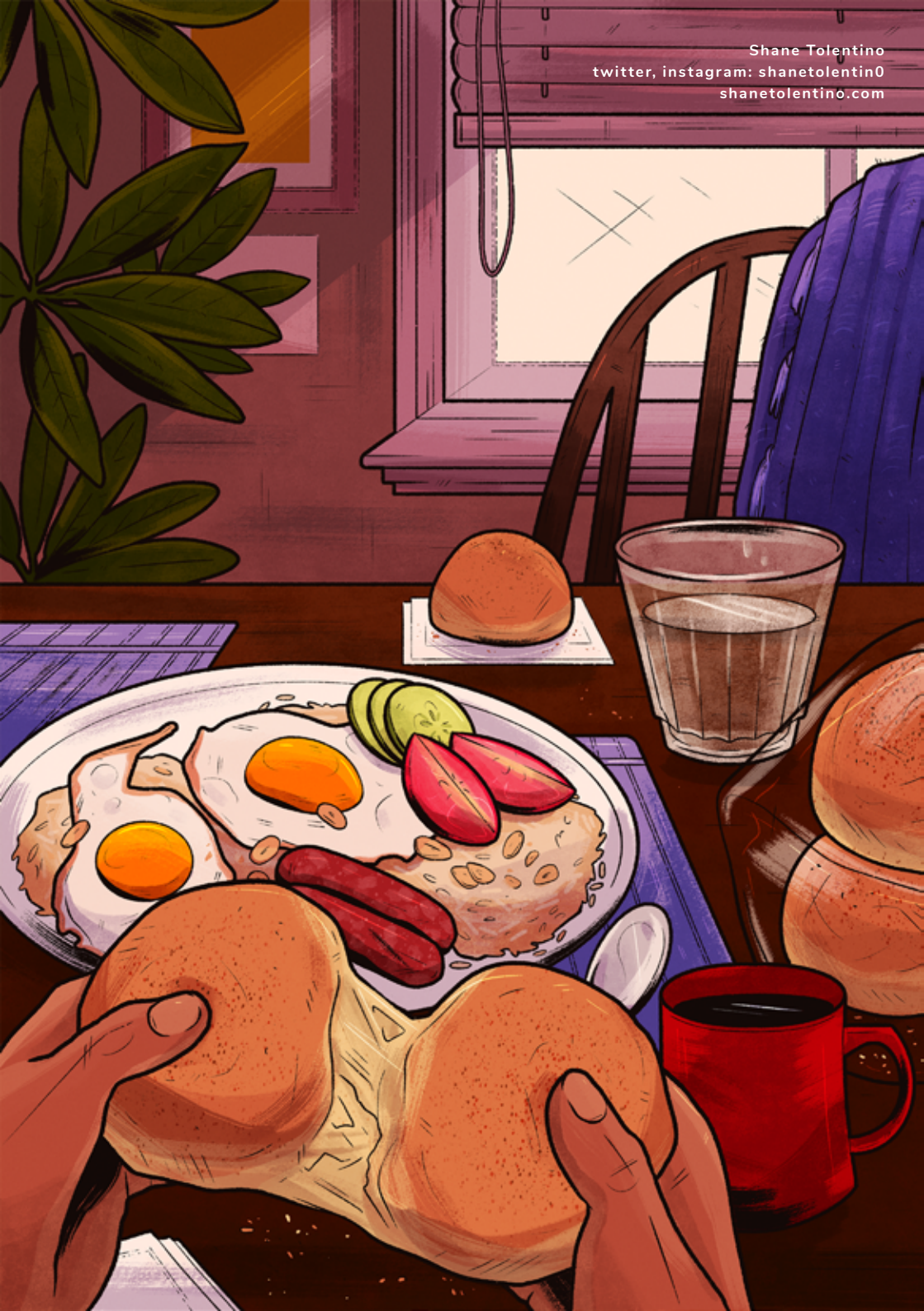
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# The Adventures of Baguette

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Baguette woke up in his usual spot - a plastic bag - and felt moist and warm. He rolled over and looked at the thermostat, seeing that the bakery was seventy-five degrees.

He groaned, annoyed that it was warm. Baguette used all of the strength he had in his doughy body and hopped onto his nubby feet.

Suddenly, he heard a door creak open. Gasp - customers.

Baguette started to panic. What if today was the day they were going to eat him? That can't happen, he still wants to explore the rest of the world! As stubborn as he was, Baguette did not want to give up.

(He was going to make it out of this damn bakery alive no matter what.)

Baguette was determined to live, so he decided to blend in with something in the area. Near the corner behind the counter, he saw a brown paper bag. He tried to smirk, but he couldn't - he remembered he doesn't have a face. Baguette bounced up and down until he hopped inside the paper bag, relieved. He believed he was safe.

Of course, safety wouldn't last forever, and he had to find a way to get out of the room while still inconspicuously hiding in the paper bag. He decided maybe he could slide a bit since he was still soggy from his sweat.

The bread inched away from the corner. It was hard to navigate when he couldn't see outside of the paper bag, but regardless, he persevered. Baguette continued to inch further and further until he accidentally stumbled over.

"Oh, fiddlesticks," Baguette whined. He wiggled around until he finally made it back into the paper bag. "Ah. There we go."

He used his strength in his doughy back to hop back up onto his nub to start trudging his way to safety. Baguette still couldn't see where he was going, but he was sure that the paper bag had a good fate for his destination.

Suddenly, he ran into something and fell backward with an oof. He peeked out from the paper bag and immediately began panicking.

He was looking into the eyes of a human, and the human was staring back at him.

Baguette quickly took cover in the paper bag, hoping the human didn't see him. He felt himself getting lifted and his mind was racing with multiple thoughts at once. The human took him out of the bag and the first thing that Baguette thought of doing was using his karate chop skills - so he folded in half and hit the human in the wrist and fell to the floor.

"Owie, that hurt," Baguette cried, before realizing he had to hurry and get moving or else he wasn't going to see another day.

Baguette hopped up onto his nub and started hopping away. The human screamed in terror, wanting to chase after him. He could hear the humans' footsteps behind him, so he hopped faster. He knew he couldn't keep running forever, so he tried

to scan the area for a place to hide. While he was looking, he didn't see where he was going and ran into the kitchen door.

He could hear the human's voice from behind him, so he scrambled onto his nub and tried turning to the right. He entered the diner, running through it and going down the hallway to see if he could go into one of the rooms.

This proved to be unsuccessful, as the human was starting to gain on him.

"Come here, you doughy food!" the human screamed. "I'm so hungry!"

Baguette made a pained noise out of discomfort as he tried to run faster. He continued hopping along his merry way, looking around to find a place to hide.

This proved to be unsuccessful once again.

*Maybe if I leave this stupid place*, Baguette thought. He stops for a second to take a breath before making his way to the exit. On his way there, he, unfortunately, wasn't paying attention and ran into a human's foot, the sudden impact causing him to exclaim oof.

Well, his plan to escape had been thwarted badly. Why did the world have to curse him so much?

Baguette attempted to hop back onto his nub but found that he's too exhausted to try to move after running around. He fell onto his back, trying to catch his breath.

That's when he suddenly got an idea. He could roll to the exit.

Baguette gasped and began using his bread-like abilities to roll toward the door. He arrived there with yet another *oof*.

He decided to try and push the door open, but it was hard when he had little to no energy left. He was also a literal creation of *dough* and other ingredients, so obviously he wouldn't have much success with that attempt.

Baguette was nearly ready to give up for the third time that day, but miraculously, the door swung open thanks to a customer. He gasped, quickly standing on his nub and hopping out with the customer as the bakery door shut behind him.

"I'm free!" Baguette yelled. He heard the people who chased him crying from inside the bakery, but he didn't care.

He continued hopping on his nub as he went along his way to who knows where. The humans ate pizza for dinner that night.

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# Sweet Potato Braid Buns

**Phantom Mistress**
twitter: trash_bear_uwu, ko-fi.com/missphantom

Total time: 2 hours | Makes 15 to 20 buns

## Ingredients:

- 1 kg of non prepared flour
- 300 gr of water
- 500 gr of sweet potato puree
- 20 gr of salt
- 20 gr of instant yeast or fresh yeast
- 130 gr of white sugar
- 200 gr of butter
- 10 cloves
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 3 yolks

## Directions:

1. Before anything, clean the sweet potatoes and bring them to boil with the cloves and cinnamon, You can add sugar if you want for a sweeter taste and let boil till soft.
2. Once it finishes boiling, you can mash them into a puree or cut it into chunks, and let it cool down.
1. In the bowl mix the dry ingredients; the flour, salt, sugar. (If using instant yeast add this as well.)
2. Start adding the water and knead until you get a homogenous mass. (If you used fresh yeast, make sure to dissolve it with two fingers of water and add it.)
3. Spread flour on a table or surface and throw the dough on it.
4. Knead it for 20 minutes, slowly adding the butter.
5. Once you get an elastic and soft mass, start adding the sweet potato pieces.

6. Knead for 10 more minutes.
7. Cut the dough and make small balls out of it. They should be around the size of half of your palm.
8. With the balls, use a rolling pin to stretch them as much as it allows you.
9. Grabbing both ends of the dough start braiding it, crossing each side until finished, joining the two ends.
10. Grab your tray and butter it to avoid the dough sticking to it.
11. Place the braids on the tray and cover it with a humid cloth. Let sit for 40 or more minutes (until the dough has doubled its size).
12. Preheat the oven at 180 Celsius or 350–375 Fahrenheit.
13. Whisk three yolks spread them on top of the breads, to give them a top glaze.
14. Put the tray in the oven and bake for 15 minutes.

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# The Many Meals of Bridget and Lane

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**Breakfast**

Lane doesn't wake up for her alarm as it blares from her phone. Or, rather, she wakes up just long enough to turn the alarm off, then goes back to sleep. She does wake up, however, when she hears the lighter, more melodic notes of a familiar custom ringtone. Without opening her eyes, she grabs her phone from her bedside table (which takes a few tries) and presses it to her ear.

"Good morning, Sweetheart," Lane says. It comes out as a sleepy mumble.

"Good morning, Lane," Bridget responds from the other end of the line. "You're still not up yet?"

"It's six am here!" Lane's voice is a purposefully pathetic whine this time. "Take pity on me!"

"Nope. Your first class is at seven thirty. You need time to get ready and grab breakfast in the dining hall," Bridget lectures. "No mercy. Get up."

Lane groans, but dutifully rolls herself out of bed and starts getting dressed. "I'm not going all the way to the dining hall this early. I'll just have something at home. Besides, if I stay here then we can video call without getting weird looks."

“Turn on your camera, then!”

Lane turns on her camera as she walks into the kitchen that her dorm is blessedly equipped with. Bridget smiles brightly at her from the screen.

“What time is your first class today?” Lane asks. “It’s already nine over there, right?”

“I don’t have anything until one pm,” Bridget announces proudly.

“Oh, screw you!” Lane exclaims as she pops some bread on the toaster. “How do you never have any morning classes?”

“It’s because I love myself and sign up for classes accordingly,” Bridget says. “Want me to quiz you on some Spanish while we eat?”

“Sure. What level did you test into this year?”

“Five. It’s basically Gender Studies in Spanish. We were assigned Judith Butler translated into Spanish last week.”

“Oh my god.” Lane gets her toast and sits down to eat. “That sounds impossible. I can’t believe they had us in the same Spanish class in high school. You’re a legend and I’m over here barely able to use the conditional tense.”

Bridget suddenly peered very closely at her phone, like a grandma who’s trying to figure out an app for the first time.

“Wait, what are you eating?” Bridget already sounds incredulous.

“Just some toast.”

“What kind of toast?” Bridget asks.

“Toast toast! It’s just white bread.” Lane says. “What’s the problem?”

“Just plain white bread?” Bridget sounds personally offended. “With nothing on it? No butter? No cinnamon and sugar?”

Bridget proudly holds up her own breakfast from Lane to see. It’s also toast, but it’s the fancy kind of cinnamon toast that has the swirls of cinnamon sugar baked into it.

“I’m lazy in the mornings!” Lane complains. “I don’t want to put all the effort in!”

“It’s not that much effort to put a couple things on your toast,” Bridget counters. “And I promise it’s worth it.”

**Lunch**

“Guess what I’m eating!” Lane says through a mouthful of food. It’s a Saturday afternoon and she’s getting crumbs all over her books as she tries to study, eat, and video call with her girlfriend all at the same time.

“I don’t know,” Bridget says. “A sandwich?”

“Close! I’m having cinnamon toast!” Lane holds it up to her phone for Bridget to see.

Bridget raises her eyebrows. “For lunch?”

“Yes, for lunch! I can eat whatever I want whenever I want! I won’t be limited by traditional mealtime constraints!” Lane takes a crunchy bite to emphasize her point. “I thought you would be proud of me! You’re the one who told me to try cinnamon toast

the other day."

"I am proud of you! You actually listened to me for once."

"I always listen to you," Lane objects. "I just listen to myself more. This is really tasty, by the way. I've never had cinnamon toast before."

"How did you make it?"

"Made some toast with white bread, put butter, cinnamon, and sugar on it," Lane said. "Just like you told me."

"It's even better if you actually bake it from scratch, with the swirls in it."

Lane closed her eyes, grinning as she imagined it. "You'll have to make it for me sometime."

"I could send you the recipe."

Lane opens her eyes just so she can give Bridget a doubtful look. "I think that might be a little beyond my capabilities."

"Maybe you'll surprise yourself."

**Dinner**

Lane is making some frozen pasta dish on the stovetop. She's done it a bunch of times and it always tastes pretty good as far as frozen dinners go. But that wasn't the part of her meal that she was worried about.

"Why are you trying to make the bread and dinner at the same time?" Bridget asks from the screen on Lane's phone. Said

phone is propped up precariously on top of a bag of flour so that Bridget can see what Lane's doing. "If you're having the cinnamon toast for dessert you could just make it after dinner."

"I'm not having it for dessert!" Lane protests. "It's a side dish. Now how am I supposed to roll this? Short ways or long ways?"

"Roll it like you were rolling a jelly roll," Bridget says. "And you're having cinnamon toast as a side dish? With what?"

"With this frozen fettuccine alfredo type thing." Lane stirs said frozen fettuccine alfredo type thing. "It's totally normal to have bread as a side dish with pasta. And I don't know what a jelly roll is."

"Just roll it in the direction that will give you the most cinnamon swirls. And a nice, crusty Italian bread might go well with pasta, but not something sweet with cinnamon in it!"

"Okay, Miss Master Chef. Someone's clearly never had salted caramel. Sweet and savory taste awesome together." Lane orients her dough the way that she assumes it's supposed to go. Maybe. "Okay, I'm gonna try to roll it."

"Godspeed. I can't really see what you're doing, so I don't know if you're doing it wrong or not. But I trust you."

"Want me to angle the camera down?" Lane asks.

"Nah. I'd rather see your pretty face."

"Aw!" Lane rolls the dough carefully, but it keeps sticking to itself in weird ways. She takes a break to stir her pasta, then goes back to rolling.

"Why didn't you just make your pasta while you were waiting

for your dough to rest?"

"Huh?"

"While you were waiting for..." Bridget stares into her camera in disbelief. "Baby, did you put yeast in your bread?"

"Yeah."

"And did you let it rest for an hour?"

"Um..." Lanes bites her lip. "I think I saw that in the recipe, but I didn't really know what it meant so I just kinda ignored it. I assumed it wasn't necessary."

"It's part of the recipe!" Bridget blanches. "Why wouldn't it be necessary?"

"I don't know! I put in all the ingredients, so I thought it would all work itself out." Lane stares down at the sticky mass of dough on her counter. "Is my bread ruined?"

"Honestly? Probably yes." Bridget offers her most reassuring smile. "But you should bake it anyway, just to find out for sure."

**Dessert**

Lane had never been to New York before tonight. Usually, Bridget comes home to California, but this winter break they decided that Lane should come out and see Bridget's college. The plane is delayed twice because of a snow storm happening on the east coast. For a while, Lane is concerned that her flight will get canceled entirely. But eventually, at about six pm, the flight she had booked for that morning finally takes off. It's a

little after midnight when the plane lands. It's even later than that when she finally collects her luggage and gets in a ride-share. Part of her considers just getting a hotel for the night so she won't have to disturb Bridget's sleep. She dismisses that idea pretty much immediately. Bridget will be waiting up for her, and Lane wants to see her as soon as possible.

Somehow Lane had always assumed that Bridget lived in Manhattan, but when Lane gives the driver Bridget's address he takes her to Yonkers. She's dropped off in front of an apartment she's never seen before while sheets of snow come down around her. For the hundredth time that night, she wishes she hadn't worn her California clothes on the plane. For the first time that night, she really hopes she's not lost.

She video calls Bridget.

"Hi!' Bridget answers the phone without a trace of tiredness. Lane knew she would be waiting up for her. In fact, Lane thinks she sees Bridget wearing an apron, her kitchen in the background. "How are you? Did you make it okay?"

"I think I'm outside?" Lane turns around so the front of the apartment is visible in the background of the call. "Is this your place?"

"Yes!" Bridget's video shakes as she jumps up and down in excitement. "Oh my god, I can't believe you're finally here! I'll be right down!"

Bridget hangs up. Not two minutes later she bursts through the door and runs out into the snow in her pajamas, bunny slippers, and an apron. Then they're kissing, so Lane picks Bridget up and spins her around for good measure. She'd forgotten how tiny Bridget is in real life.

“We should go inside before we both die of exposure,” Lane says when they break apart. “Also, you taste suspiciously like cinnamon.”

“I made you a loaf of cinnamon bread as a welcome present!” Bridget exclaims. “I felt bad since your attempt at the recipe was such a disaster. I was going to wait and give you the first slice, but then your flight kept getting delayed so I ate some. I just finished a second loaf, though! So we can have that one together!”

“Bridget.”

“Yes?”

“I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

They kiss one more time, briefly touching their cold lips together.

“Now let’s get inside before the bread gets cold.”

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# Cob the Adventurous Roll

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Once upon a time, there was a boy. This boy was a witch—not that he knew it yet. No one knew it yet; nor had anyone noticed the odd things that happened around him.

This boy lived in a bakery, one of several sons to the baker and her husband. Early in the morning, not yet awake, he dreamt of bread, triggered by the delectable smell of baking loaves wafting into his room, familiar and as wonderful each time as the first. The boy smiled.

And on the floor below, a roll came to life. The unconscious wish for a perfect roll, freshly baked, the outside crisp and golden and the insides fluffy and white, combined with his magic, coalesced in one roll. From the tray on the counter where it was cooling, it grew two little round feet, like miniature rolls themselves. It grew two cute doughy arms. It gained two eyes, and a smiling mouth.

Cob was born.

It was, one could say, the runt of the litter, in so much that it was the smallest on the tray. Cob did not notice this. Cob was very busy marvelling at suddenly existing, at seeing, at trying to take everything in about the world it had found itself in.

In most bakeries, however, bread does not move. The baker certainly did not expect to see a roll hop off the tray and walk across the surface. She screeched. Cob, having not experienced much sound yet, startled violently, and ran as fast as its little

round legs would take it. This took Cob outside, although it did not notice for a long while, intent as Cob was on running as far as possible from such a loud noise.

Cob ran and ran and ran, until it couldn't run any further. It was still a loud place, with lots of wheeled machines, so Cob tucked itself into a bag of letters, and snuggled up. The last thing it noticed was a long, loud whistle dulled from the distance and a gentle steady rumbling, before it promptly fell into a deep sleep for the first time in its short life.

—

Awoken by jostling, Cob climbed to the top of the bag and peered over the top. The view that greeted it was not familiar at all. In fact, it had a sense that it was very, very far away from its birthplace now.

Cob wished it hadn't run quite so far.

The bag was being put onto a cart and gradually moving away from wherever it had been. Cob, blessed with an innate sense of knowing where its creator was, realised it was going the wrong way, and jumped out of the bag, into the street.

There, Cob was hit with the sudden knowledge that the world was a lot *bigger* than it. People walked by, goliaths to the tiny roll, carts and carriages going this way and that. Cob fled from the hubbub to a quieter corner, and whimpered quietly. With such small legs, how was it ever meant to reach its creator again! If only it hadn't run so far in the first place, but it had been so startled...

Cob spent a few doughy moments wallowing in uncertainty and misery, certain that returning home would be a futile effort,

and far beyond impossible. Surely the baker would screech again even if it made it all the way there! But then, its creator would also be there… they had not yet met. Cob wanted to meet its creator, to thank them for giving it life. Perhaps it was worth trying, at least? Cob had no other places to go other than home anyway.

Therefore, Cob bravely stood up again, squashing its cute little hands into an approximation of fists. At least it knew what direction to go, that was a huge start!

Additionally blessed with the practicality that comes from being a staple food, simple and wholesome, Cob reasoned that if it began to walk, it would eventually arrive. Far it may be, but with little legs and little steps—albeit many, *many* little steps—it would make its way home.

Had Cob had lungs, it would have taken a deep breath. Lacking this facility, Cob merely pulled itself upwards, and took the first little step of several thousand.

—

"You look tasty," someone cawed behind Cob. Cob, unaware that anyone had been around it, jumped, twisting around swiftly to discover who had interrupted its journey.

Two crows, sleek and black, with a beady look in their eye. Looking up, Cob saw another on the wooden fence surrounding the field Cob was walking beside.

Cob was, for all it had not met many beings in its journey to prove this, rather friendly and open to all types of beings, large and small. However, something told it that these crows were not here for idle chatter.

That ‘something’ was probably the comment about looking tasty. One did not comment on another’s perceived tastiness to a friend, after all!

Cob was rather dusty now, but it could assure anyone that it must be tasty, because everything its creator’s mother made was tasty! However, Cob also thought this might not be something to mention at this moment in time.

“Mmm, you do look good…” another crow piped up, eyeing up the small roll.

“I’m sorry! I have to go, I won’t be tasty at all!” Cob insisted, and stepped backwards. The crows gained a glint to their eye.

“Most things that *smell* tasty are *tasty*, though…” the crow on the fence cawed delightfully. Cob did not have to eat, so it did not truly understand hunger, but being eaten sounded very unpleasant indeed. Yet Cob had no powers to call its own, and was hardly powerful—how could it possibly take on one single crow, let alone three?

All at once, there was a mighty screech. Cob cowered with a whimper, covering its eyes with its little hands the best it could, to avoid watching whatever might happen. It heard a short kerfuffle and some indignant squawking, and yet no beaks piercing it. Peering past its hands, it saw with some horror that the number of crows had doubled. Not only that, but three of them were right in front of Cob!

“Leave the poor thing alone!” one of the closer crows piped up. Stunned, Cob let its hands drop entirely. A pleasant aroma reached its senses.

“Yes, leave be! He is one of us, you ought to be ashamed!”

another cawed loudly, stepping back and protectively curling a wing around Cob. The scent intensified, and for a moment, Cob was in a kitchen, a fresh herby smell. Cob looked up. Whereas the first three crows were black, and what Cob assumed to be normal, *this* crow was green. Looking again, it was composed almost entirely of long thin dark green leaves, except for its eyes, which were the same as the other crows. The other two closer crows were similarly plant based, one a multitude of very small leaves, and the other with wider, almost bluish green leaves. They all smelt wonderful, reminding Cob of his short time in the bakery he'd been born in.

One of us, they'd said. They had creators too?

The original crows squawked unhappily.

"You better protect him then, else he'll be gobbled up in no time!" the one in the fence said, turning around. "Come on, let's see if the humans have put their old food out yet," it remarked. The other two nodded, and took off; everyone waited until they were past the trees across the field before speaking.

"Phew! I thought they might try us too!" One said, heaving a sigh of relief. It was the one with long thin leaves. The one with big leaves shuffled her wings indignantly.

"They would not dare, Ro! Crows would hardly turn to leaves unless they were quite desperate, even as good as we all smell," She drawled, raising her beak in the air.

The one with tiny leaves hopped around and tilted her head at Cob. "Are you lost?"

Cob, although grateful for being saved, was still a little reticent to trust these strange creatures immediately. They still looked

like crows, after all. He shook his head, and inched back. Big Leaf noticed this, and ruffled her feathers once more.

"Goodness me, what ruffians are we! Ladies, we've to introduce ourselves at once!" She cawed loudly, seeming to be the leader of the bunch—or at least the loudest. The three of them scrambled into place, Big Leaf in the middle, the other two either side.

"We are the Scarborough Crows!" They all announced at once, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. It seemed that they had done this before. "I am Sage!" Big Leaf stated.

"I'm Rosemary, call me Ro!" said the one with long thin leaves, and bowed.

"Thyme," the third one murmured, dipping her head just a little, a few little leaves fluttering to the ground.

They seemed harmless enough, if a little eccentric. Cob smiled. "I'm Cob! Thank you for helping me!"

"Not at all, little one," Ro assured him, "Crows ought to know better than try and eat a creation, I would have thought. It's rude, honestly." Cob nodded, despite knowing nothing about the etiquette of eating 'creations'—he assumed this meant he was one. Presumably only certain creatures had specific creators, then. Thyme nodded along with him.

"Now then! Wherever were you going? You seem very young for such a big journey, you're miles from any houses here!" Sage started.

"Home!" Cob said merrily. "I accidentally got too far away, so I need to get back to my creator!"

“Accidentally?” Thyme asked, puzzled, but before she was even finished, Ro cut across her.

“I’m sure we can help you get there, if you’d like? A small roll like you, all alone out here at night… I daren’t think of it…”

True enough, night was falling, the air chilling around them, the sky turning wonderful shades above the horizon. Cob had not thought as far as night, although being so active was tiring. A rest would likely be welcome. Apparently that might be dangerous?

“I know which way to go! It’s still far though… but you can tag along if you’d like!”

“My dear Cob, I’m afraid we must insist!” Sage stated firmly, “There are too many who would have no qualms of eating a creation, especially an artisan one such as yourself! We must get you home to your creator as soon as possible!” Sage put the tips of her wings to her hips, beak in the air, her stance allowing no possibility of argument.

“Thyme, shall you and Sage look for something we could carry Cob in? I shall stay and look after him. Just don’t let Sage go into any buildings, she’s too loud…”

Sage objected to this, loudly, but Thyme nodded.

“Let’s go, O Wise One,” Thyme muttered, sounding as though she was not being entirely complimentary. Sage either ignored or did not notice the implication, stepping back to give Cob and Ro some shelter from the wing-falls.

“We shall be back soon! Stay alert!” Sage crowed, and took off. Thyme dipped her head at Ro and Cob, and followed her, back

the way Cob had come.

Suddenly, it was peaceful once more. Ro chuckled quietly.

"Shall I tell you of the last time Sage was trying to take something from a building? It is quite the tale!"

"Yes please!" Cob replied. It might be quite the wait. Ro settled down, so Cob copied her, tucked up against the dirt bank at the side of the path.

"Back when our creator was still alive..."

—

Cob was not entirely sure how long it was before the other two crows returned, but there was very little light left, the trees and grasses looming ominously over them and rustling, creating an illusion of something approaching when it was merely the wind. Ro did her best to comfort him, but night is a scary time for a young one, having not truly experienced one before.

"... it's your leaves, I could swear it! They ought to rustle more, not less, Thyme! However do you stay so quiet, it is a veritable mystery..." Cob caught Sage's voice before he could see them, squinting into the dark night. The only light was the stars and the half moon, granting him enough light to see their last moments of descent before the two of them landed a little way from him and Ro. "She is a marvel at stealth, Rosemary! What would we do without her?" Sage said. Thyme was unable to reply courtesy of a cloth clamped firmly in her beak, something she laid down in front of Cob. Her and Ro swiftly flattened it out to reveal a small rag of some kind.

"Based on your utter lack of stealth, Sage, we would not get

very far in missions such as this," Ro said teasingly. Cob giggled, recalling the stories Ro had told him. Sage looked somewhat miffed, so Ro added, "But you are the greatest among us at finding things, so we all work together."

Sage brightened.

"It's too dark now, we should shelter until morning," Thyme muttered.

"Quite, we shall need rest for our journey! I fear our small friend would not do well come rain, so let us shelter him well," Sage decided, before the issue of the logistics of carrying Cob was placed by Ro.

The solution involved a lot of teamwork, the corners of the cloth being stuffed into Ro's mouth, being designated as the biggest crow among them, with Cob neatly tucked in the middle. It did not seem entirely secure, but Thyme quietly reassured him that they had done this before for heavier creatures than Cob.

Thus, Sage led them to a leafy tree, wherein they rested for the night, gathering energy for the days ahead.

—

Several days later, Cob could sense they were getting closer, and excitedly informed the crows. Ro hardly reacted—comforting, as Cob's flying safety relied on her not speaking—whilst Thyme nodded. Sage launched into a speech praising their efforts and wondering about his home, without really giving him space to answer. Cob smiled, used to their dynamic by now, and kept an eye out.

When the fields began to peter out into a village a short while

later, he grinned. Cob had been drawn here by the sense of his creator, even had he not, he would still have recognised that smell anywhere.

"Down there! That's my home!" He cried, trying not to wiggle too much in excitement. Ro banked sharply, going into a wide spiral to lose height, landing on the roof first.

"Sure?" Thyme asked, hopping down the roof and peering over the edge. Cob nodded.

"Well, it is a bakery and a quaint one at that! Lovely!" Sage cawed. "Let us reunite creator and creation! A magical moment for certain!"

A few short hops and a controlled descent from the roof, Cob found himself back in the courtyard of the bakery. He didn't recognise it himself, but there was a connection via his creator. He started towards the door, but then hesitated.

What if the baker was angry at him? What if- what if his creator didn't like him?

"Cob? What's the matter?" Ro asked gently, Sage, for once, remaining quiet. He turned to answer her, but the sound of footsteps running down the stairs and the door swinging open interrupted them. At the door; Cob's creator, staring at them wide-eyed.

He rubbed his eyes, and looked again at the small roll in the courtyard, legs, arms and all. He blinked.

"You weren't... just a dream then?" He asked of Cob, who shook his head. "I- I made you, didn't I? Mother said I might be a witch, but she couldn't catch up with you..."

Cob nodded, unsure whether the boy was glad to see him or not. Just as he thought this, the boy broke out into a grin.

"Mother! Father! Cob came back!" he yelled into the house gleefully, and crouched down in front of Cob. "A familiar! That's your name, isn't it? Cob?" Cob nodded, elated; at this moment, the boy noticed the three crows behind him, and the cloth. "Did they help you get back? They're familiars too, right?"

Sage cawed in agreement, although Cob did not think the boy understood her words. The boy stood, and bowed deeply.

"Thank you for bringing Cob back to me. I will do my best to always treat him kindly!"

The Scarborough Crows all crowed loudly in appreciation. The boy's parents turned up, the baker in her flour dusted apron, swooping down to scoop Cob up off the floor.

"I'm sorry I frightened you, before!" she cried, "I was so surprised... I'm ever so glad you made it back to us, we were so worried about you!" She smiled as she gently brushed off some of the dirt that had clung to Cob on his journey. Cob grinned.

Home, at last.

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# Little Curry Bread Girl

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One morning, when the sun is warm and bright, the baker takes a silver penny and heads outside. He enjoys visiting the local market for fresh goods. Eggs, cacao, cheese, and fruits. He writes them down on paper and ticks them off with a pen. Honey, turmeric, milk and jam.

But the baker frowns under his pork pie hat. He has been in a bit of a pickle lately. His bread is lacking a certain finesse. He tries and tries, but there is not a drop of creative juice left. How will he ever make good bread?

Fairies are efficient, the villagers say. All they need is to glance at his troubled face and hand him a basket of ingredients. Surely they would guarantee him a recipe for success. The baker scribbles an extra note for directions, and then off he trods to the fairies' lair.

Soon enough, he arrives in the company of the fairies. They give him a quick scan and place a basket laden with goods in his hands. The baker is pleased, though when he checks his list again, there is no ingredient he could understand.

Wearing a funny look, the baker thanks the fairies for their generosity. He gets ready to leave, but the creatures with silvery wings hold out their hands. They smile pleasantly, offering to sprinkle in a secret, well, in exchange for a penny and a hat.

"When you are feeling down, make yourself curry bread."

And so the baker returns home feeling rather strange. With a balloon whisk, he mixes the ingredients in a large bowl. He kneads the lump into dough and lets it rest. Preparing the curry filling, he pauses to wipe a sweat from his brow.

Curry bread often conjures warm memories of before and after. He remembers with a wistful smile how he had tucked fresh bakes into his pocket for later. Singing a soft melody, he wraps the curry with the bread roll, imbuing each fold with tenderness. Then he leaves the bread to bake in the oven, dusting his hands off his apron. Now he just needs to wait. Folding his arms, he lays his head on the table, and dozes off to sleep.

The baker wishes to relive the same taste again. However, it remains a distant past. For as long as he dwells in dreams, he cannot see the flowers at his feet.

The chirrupings of skylarks by the window stir him awake. He rouses and stretches his arms over his head. Through dazed eyes, he peeks over at the oven. His heart thumps at the sight.

Hastily wearing his mittens, he hurries over and pulls out the tray. The fragrance of spices envelopes his face. Steam rises into the air in wisps. Under the filtered sunlight, the bread glistens. It is puffed and round with a rich golden brown.

Filled to the brim with elation, the baker places the bread carefully on a wire rack to cool. He sets aside a moment to admire his craft. But the true test comes when he reveals what lies on the inside. The baker grows nervous. He wobbles as he transfers the bread onto a plate, as if it is made of precious glass. Raising a fork and knife, he takes a deep breath. He slices the bread cleanly open in half.

Out oozes the viscous gravy from the centre of the bread. Out emerges a tiny girl tucked under the thick blanket of curry. She yawns and rubs her twinkling eyes, as though waking from a cozy dream. She must be around the size of his thumb. Stunned, the baker can only stare.

“Bread,” she utters her first word.

And so, through handmade tenderness and warmth, the Little Curry Bread Girl is born.

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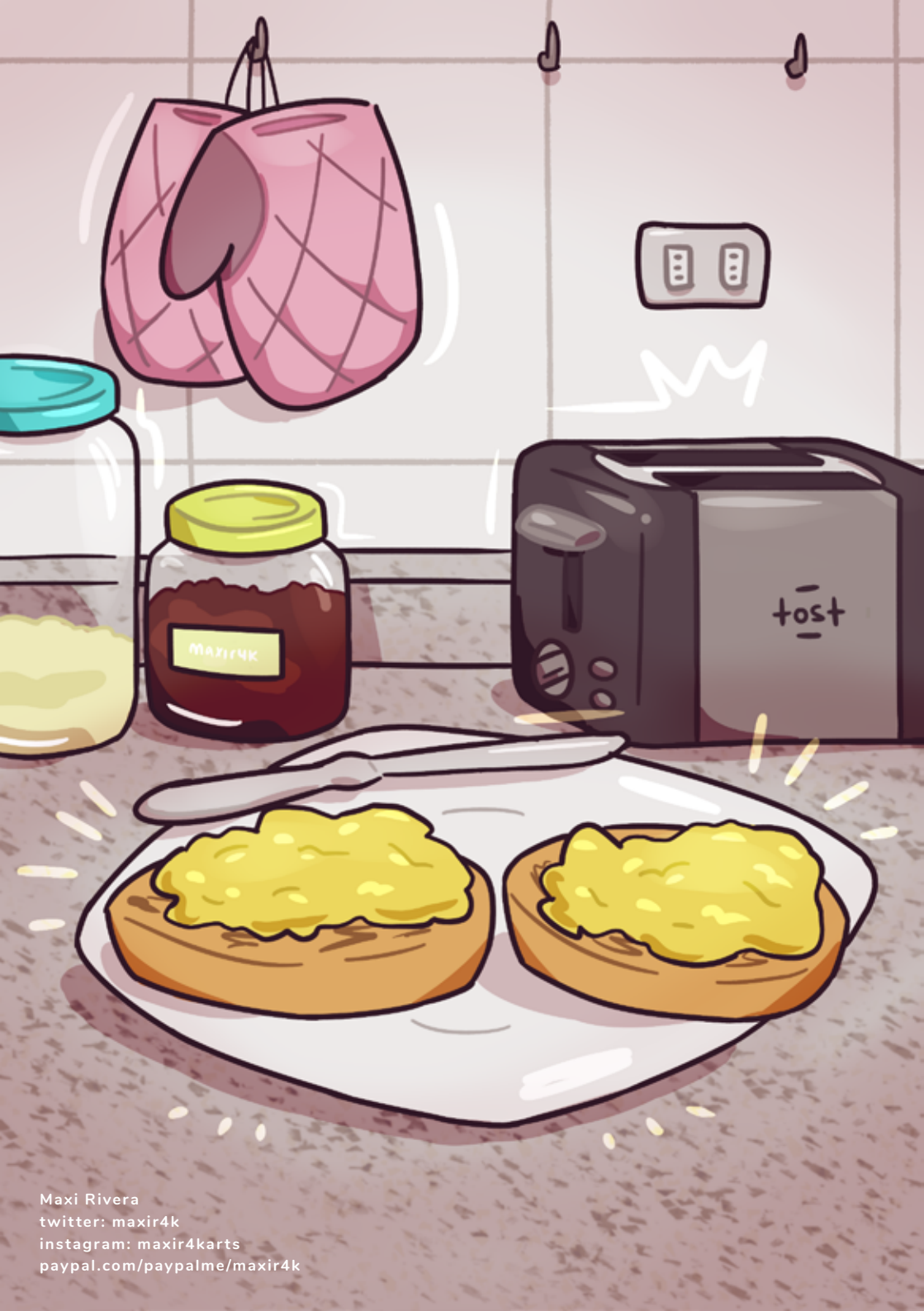


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# Of Carbs and Calories

Starry
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"If you'd just let me explain—"

"NO! Hold on, shut up, I KNOW I'm right!"

There's a tone of finality as Mayu comes in through the apartment door and watches her two roommates go off, Itsuki and Hoshi standing up to each other in their living room. She sighs and goes to pour herself some water before settling back on the couch, feet propping up on the ottoman. "I've been trying to figure out what's happening and I still have no clue what's going on. What the hell are we arguing about this time?"

Both of her best friends snap towards her. Hoshi throws her hands into the air and Itsuki just gently shoves her, grinning when she goes to pinch his arm and ducks out of the way. "Listen to this shit, okay? This *moron* thinks that Texas Roadhouse bread is better than Olive Garden breadsticks!"

"But they are," Itsuki insists, trying not to laugh as Hoshi snarls at him and turns her head away. "I've got my points, and they're all valid, which means you're wrong."

Before Hoshi can open her mouth (and probably tackle Itsuki while she's at it), Mayu holds up her hand. "Hold on. Shut it for a sec, idiots. Let's get to the bottom of this. First off, I want to hear both of your arguments, and I want to know why. Did you want to make a PowerPoint and then get back to me?"

Hoshi and Itsuki take a moment to think about their options; Mayu knows she's got them hooked when Hoshi takes the time to toss her phone down and haul ass to the bedroom to snatch her laptop, trying to duck the swipe that Itsuki attempts to clip her with. "Rude!" Hoshi calls as she rips it open and starts up her presentation.

Itsuki gives a rude gesture and goes to start working on his own as well. Mayu tries not to laugh and goes back to her phone, knowing she's earned some peace and quiet for the next twenty minutes.

It's not long before Itsuki finishes first and proudly hits '*Play from Start*', making sure to share it to the TV that sits in their apartment complex. "I'll be going first," he says proudly, making sure to fix his rumpled t-shirt. "Hoshi, close your damn laptop before I knock it off your lap."

"You're the worst."

Mayu gestures to the screen and runs a hand through curly pink hair, wincing when her nails snag a curl momentarily. "Ow. Okay, you can go. Impress me with your public speaking skills, loser. Make me want some biscuits."

Hoshi rolls her eyes but still grins regardless.

Itsuki clears his throat, clicking from the title page of '*Texas Roadhouse: A Bread Story*' to his next slide. "Alright. First off, Texas Roadhouse bread is composed of, you guessed it, bread! It's got fiber and whatever is in their dough that makes it absolutely delicious, and they serve this as an appetizer because they know people will want it. It's also unlimited; if you ask nicely, you can have at least seven baskets in one meal."

“So do Olive Garden breadsticks,” Hoshi mutters, and gets nailed by a pillow to the face.

“Not your turn,” Mayu commands. “Please continue.”

Itsuki looks proud as he sticks his tongue out at his best friend before resuming. “Thank you! There’s also the popularity to account for; if you ask anyone about Texas Roadhouse, what do you think they’ll bring up? The ROLLS! No one cares about anything else there! Maybe embarrassing your friends with the birthday song, but other than that, the rolls.”

Mayu has a slight war flashback where both of her morons ratted her out to staff, and shivers at the remembrance of sitting in that stupid saddle while the waiters sang her happy birthday off-key. (She shudders and tries not to think about it.)

“My final point is the butter. There’s several types of bread that’s okay without butter, but Texas Roadhouse requires you to put that shit on.” Itsuki lets out a loving sigh. “That’s pretty much it, actually. I’ve gotten all my main points across.”

Mayu politely claps while Hoshi boos and throws a middle finger, laughing when Itsuki pouts and goes to sit down. “It was pretty good! Don’t let your ego get to your head, though. My turn, yeah?”

Mayu nods with amusement as she gets up to hook her laptop up, setting it to presentation. Hoshi whips out a clicker and points to her slides, doing some jazzy opening movements. “This entire PowerPoint consists of only a few points because I know I’m right and you’re not. Anyways! Olive Garden breadsticks are always perfectly warm, and they’re super salty. You flip it upside down to eat and there’s an explosion of salt and flavor on your tongue.”

There's a pause before Hoshi tries not to laugh. "They're.... they're also shaped really funny—"

"NO, SHUT UP!" Itsuki howls as Mayu bursts out laughing. The taller boy gets up and goes to shove Hoshi over, both of them immediately starting to wrestle again. "I REFUSE TO LET YOU WIN ON A STUPID JOKE! Mayu, revoke her presentation rights! She's not allowed to do her own thing for presentation night later this week!"

"No please!" Hoshi gasps for air, still laughing as Itsuki mercilessly tickles her. "I made Mayu laugh! I won this round!"

In the midst of their fighting, Mayu thinks about their two presentations and snorts, putting her hands over her face. Both Istuki and Hoshi are so stupid; they made a full presentation on *bread*.

"Y'all both win," Mayu says, making them both stop. "I can't decide which one is better so I pick both. Besides, you both forgot one very important restaurant with delicious bread. Raising Cane's, anyone?"

Hoshi's jaw drops while Itsuki nods with his eyes closed. "You're right. We're fools; how could we forget that beautiful bread? Eating it warm...dipping it in sauce..."

There's a silence that falls as all three think about Raising Cane's bread. Hoshi eventually sighs and gestures to her wallet that sits on the table. "Well, damn it. I'm thinking about Cane's now, and I want a full dinner, so let's go get some. I'll pay. Venmo me later."

"Sounds like a plan!" Mayu leaps to her feet and Itsuki goes to shove his friend out of the way, laughing as Mayu gasps in

mock outrage and pushes him back. “I CALL SHOTGUN!”

As they fight out the door, Hoshi rolls her eyes and grins as she ponders to herself and says, “I should order extra bread for us... maybe I can tell them no coleslaw and extra fries—”

The door closes behind them.

Merlin McGraw
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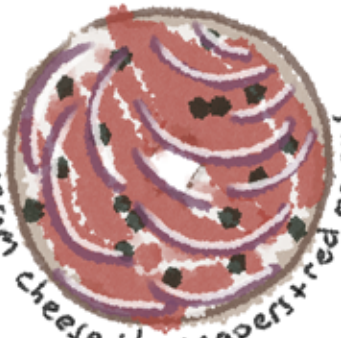
# TOPPINGS

MMcGraw

Goat cheese + pesto


cream cheese + lox + capers + red onions

plain
butter

honey

yogurt + blueberries

avocado

egg

jelly or jam

mozzarella

tomato + basil

melted cheese

garlic +

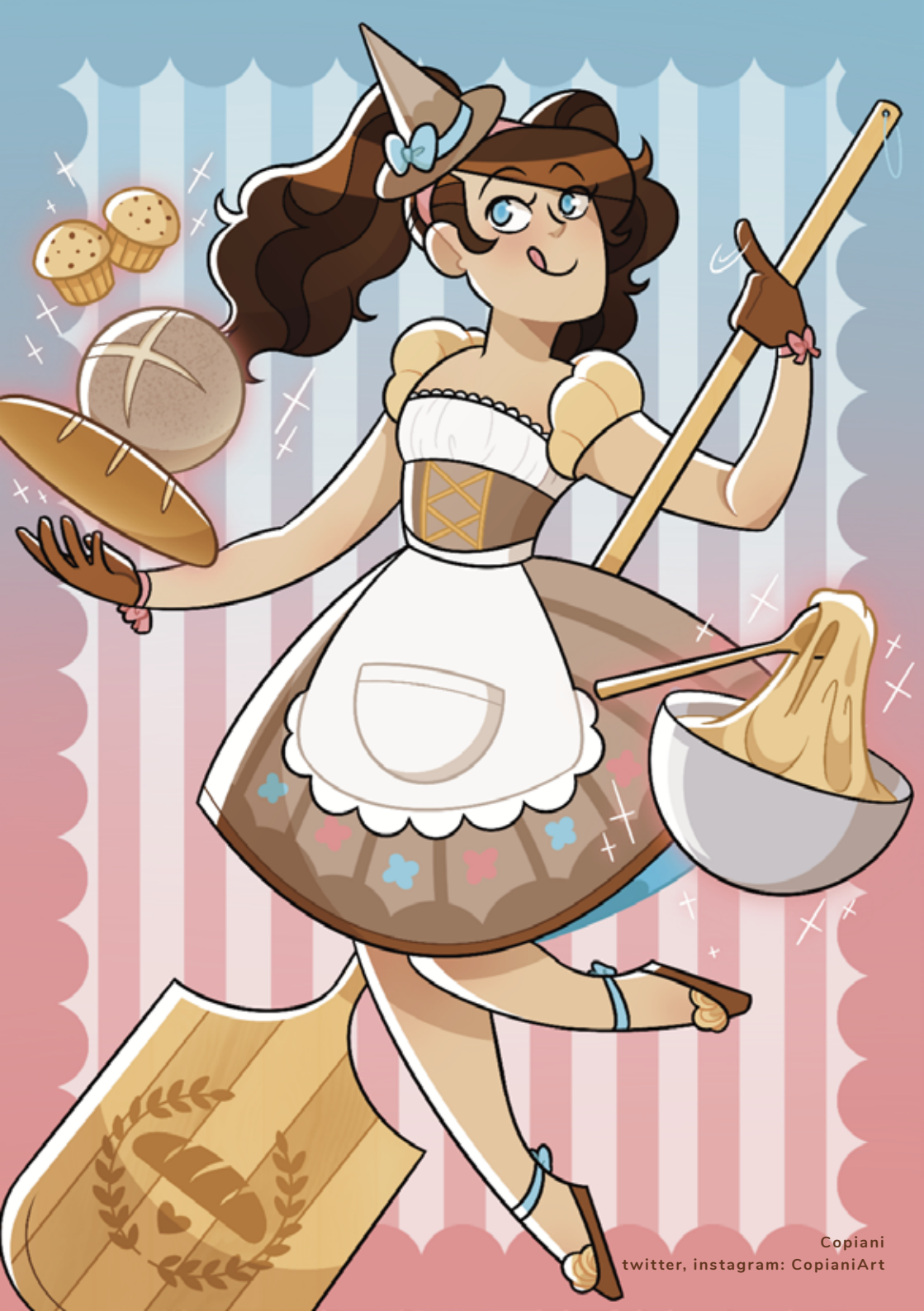
parmesan

nutella + banana

gravy

Miru
twitter: miruk00
instagram: mirukyuu
ko-fi.com/mirukyuu

**Lonepuddingcup**
**twitter, instagram: lonepuddingcup**
**ko-fi.com/asinglecupofpudding**



Copiani
twitter, instagram: CopianiArt

HEY MUM, I HAVEN'T GOT A CLUE WHAT TO COOK FOR TOMORROW?
WHAT DO YOU FEEL LIKE EATING?
PIZZA BUT MY FREEZERS EMPTY...
AL'S ALMOND ICE CREAM
WHY NOT MAKE IT?
BUT DOESN'T IT TAKE LONG TO MAKE?
MOST OF THE TIME GOES IN THE WAITING. I'LL WALK YOU THROUGH IT!
GET YOURSELF A BOWL, NOW MIX YOUR DRY INGREDIENTS INTO THE BOWL AND MAKE A WELL.
USE LUKE WARM WATER FOR YOUR YEAST, WAIT TILL IT GOES FROTHY.
MUM 15:23
POUR THE YEAST INTO THE WELL, AND MIX TOGETHER.
2 Parts Boiling Water
1 Part Cold Water
SPLOOSH
FIZZZZZ

USE THE MUSCLES I GAVE YOU AND KNEED THE AIR IN TO THE DOUGH.
WHY DO YOU THINK IT WAS YOUR DAD?
HA HA
"YOU GAVE ME?!"
HA HA
HA HA
YOU'RE RIGHT. HA
MUM 19:43
PUFF
GOOD! NOW LEAVE IT IN A BOWL, UNDER A DAMP CLOTH, OVER NIGHT.
IT SHOULD DOUBLE IN SIZE, YOU WILL NEED TO KNEED IT. ADD THE TOPPINGS.THIS ONE IS UP TO YOU!
GOOD CHOICE!
OH IT HAS TO BE SAUCE, MUSHROOMS AND PEPPERS
THEN PUT IT IN THE OVEN AND LIKE THAT YOU ARE DONE.
SEE TOLD YOU MOST OF IT IS IN THE WAITING!
TASTES AMAZING!
PGH_arts
twitter, instagram: PGH_arts
SO WHAT SHOULD I MAKE FOR PUDDING?!
UMM...
THE END

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twitter: glittermiilk
ko-fi.com/glittermilk

Mai
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ko-fi.com/adrem0ra

twitter: LBPr0ductions
tumblr - lorablackmane
ko-fi.com/lbproductions

## Baking Memories
By Lora B

I bounce into the kitchen,
My need to create has my hands itchin'.
Pullin up a stool to the recipe box
Fingers waitin' to see which one talks.

A-ha!

Quicker than a viper's strike
Deft fingers grab the paper and box alike.
One let's go of the box,
But the recipe, the others lock.

I look upon my prize:
Braided cinnamon bread,
a perfect meal to enjoy with the sunrise.

I quickly get to work:
Pulling out containers and bowls,
Measuring ingredients,
Mixing, kneading, perfecting.

Until it's ready to go in.

Half an hour passes,
Before the prize is ready for the masses.
A perfect golden brown piece appears,
A little sugar thrown on to silent cheers.

As I place it on the table and wait,
Placing a piece on a plate,
I silently return to the doorway.
I enjoy another wonderful day,
Here in my own, private bakery.

I walk into my old home,
Looking around with a fine tooth comb.
Dust has settled along the tiles,
A reminder of my trials…

The angry shouts,
That cruel face-

A laugh chases those away.

Two bodies hit my legs, making them sway.
The horrors gone…
I remind myself, it's a new dawn.

I gather them, and my courage, up.
Step inside before I break like a teacup.

"Welcome back," the doorway whispers.
"Welcome home," the hearth roars.
"Welcome," the old recipe box says.

"Hello again, old friend,"
My favorite bread recipe commends.

My fingers hesitantly still against it.
As though they've hit a barrier in front of it.

...Can I really do this?

"Come on, papa!" my daughter yells,
Smiling away the last of the horror's spell.
I smile, pick up the yellowed paper.
Before my courage vanishes like water vapor.

Orion Night
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Orion_Night

# パンタスティック 魔法 レーンジャー

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# Choosing the Right Bread Boy: A Shoujo Manga Parody

**RatGang**
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Maki had hit a roadblock. It was a dilemma she'd be arguing in her head the whole walk home from school with her friends. She knew she would come face-to-face with a situation she did not at all enjoy. Having the chance to choose from 3 wonderful choices was an unbelievably lucky thing, but Maki had been so indecisive the day before that she had run away from the store with nothing but a soda.

Her friends led the way to the corner store that had a bakery connected to it. However, she kept mulling the thoughts over in her head, remembering a certain sign on her way out the day before. She needed to be ready for the decision to come.

Maki did her best to stand tall and walk into the store with a prideful stride. Yet, it was all in vain as she came face to face with three gorgeous, delectable looking men. They all wore the handsome male uniforms from their school and atop each of their shoulders was a delicious piece of bread.

Pita-senpai, Banana Bread-senpai, and Melonpan-senpai all stood by the "Daily Specials" board at the corner of the counter. However, the second Maki entered the building, they all turned to face her with soft expressions.

"Ah, Maki-chan, what a delight to see you!" Melonpan-senpai exclaimed with delight.

“Yes,” Banana Bread-senpai stepped in front of Melonpan’s way, giving her a serious look. “We’ve been waiting here for quite some time.” Maki covered her mouth, trying not to smile at how serious Banana Bread-senpai always seemed.

She quickly bowed her head, immediately apologizing, “I’m so sorry, I had no idea you were waiting for me here.” That was a total lie, but she at least had to act like she didn’t as to not upset them.

However, Pita-senpai took her hand and pulled her in close, musing, “Oh, pay no mind to them. I’d wait hours for you, Maki-chan.”

Maki’s cheeks grew hot as her circular-headed upperclassmen leaned in close.

“Back off, would you?!” Melonpan said loudly, grabbing Pita by the wrist and moving him back from the bashful girl. “She hasn’t yet decided who she’ll go home with today.”

“Well she sure isn’t going home with someone like you,” Banana Bread cut in again, cartoon-ish puffs of steam coming from his head as if he were fresh out of the oven.

“Both of you shut up!” Pita stood tall again, crossing his arms. “You’re nothing but dessert items! Mere snacks compared to me.”

“Says the one with the plain face,” the pair said in unison. All three bread boys glared at each other with their nonexistent eyes before eagerly turning to face Maki again. “Tell us who you choose!” All three spoke this time.

"I- I, uh... I dunno'! It's so hard to choose!" the love-driven underclassman panicked, covering her face.

"Oh, well that's alright," Melonpan mused, wrapping his arm around Maki's shoulders to pull her closer to him. "I may be a bit crisp on the top, but I'm also tart and sweet. I'm so soft on the inside, I practically melt in your mouth. And that must be worth something, right?" Melonpan-senpai's voice was so unreasonably sweet that it made the girl's heart pound.

However, that sweetness seemed to be sickening to Pita. "Oh, whatever," he grumbled as he rolled his eyes. The tallest boy leaned in and gently caressed the girl's cheek. "I seem a bit plain on the outside, perhaps even a little dry depending on what's going on. But I could be whoever you want on the inside. I could hold anything for you and add a calmness to the crazy flavors you might want in life."

"Hnm!" Maki gasped, sure stars were twinkling in her eyes from how dazzling Pita-senpai really was. He really did have a lot more appeal now than when they first met.

This didn't fly with the other bread boys at all though. Banana Bread was not dazzled by Pita the way Maki was. Carefully, the toned bread reached between his counterparts and grabbed the girl's wrist to pull her to his chest away from those hoodlums. "You don't need fools like them, Maki-chan. Unlike them, I'm serious and sophisticated. I'd let you come have tea with me. I may not look tasteful from a glance, but I'm sweet and hold some spice inside too. Trust me, I'm all you'll ever need with you on a fine evening studying at home, my dear."

From there, Melonpan and Pita moved behind Banana Bread to yank him back, Pita grumbling, "Now who's being ridiculous. You're so cake-like, you shouldn't even be considered bread."

“Nonsense!” the darker bread barked back.

“Whatever- Anyways!” Melonpan stepped in front of the other two boys and looked at Maki seriously. “Who do you choose, Maki?”

“Yeah!” Pita chipped in as he and Banana Bread peeked over Melonpan’s shoulder to stare down at the girl.

“Well, I- I don’t- You know you’re all so- so great,” she said nervously, fiddling with her fingers.

“But who?!” Banana Bread pressed further.

“Maki...”

“I know, I know!”

“Maki!”

“Huh- What?” the girl looked to her left when she realized the noise came from a different direction, getting dragged out of her daydream.

Her friend stared at her with an annoyed expression, hip cocked to the side, “What’s taking so long? Just grab a package and let’s go, we gotta’ study!”

“Ah, right, sorry!” Maki blushed darkly in embarrassment as she realized she had just stared off into space daydreaming about her choices. The obsessed girl quickly looked back at the three specials of the day and her hand reached out over the large baskets. He hand wavered momentarily, her mind and movements contradicting themselves to reach for what she wanted. It took a few more moments before Maki finally snatched a yellow-ish cookie covered bread bun.

Eagerly, she jogged over to where her friends stood in line and held up her chosen item like it was an immaculate prize, “I choose him!”

“Him?”

“Ah, this... I choose this, hehe.”

Tam Perks
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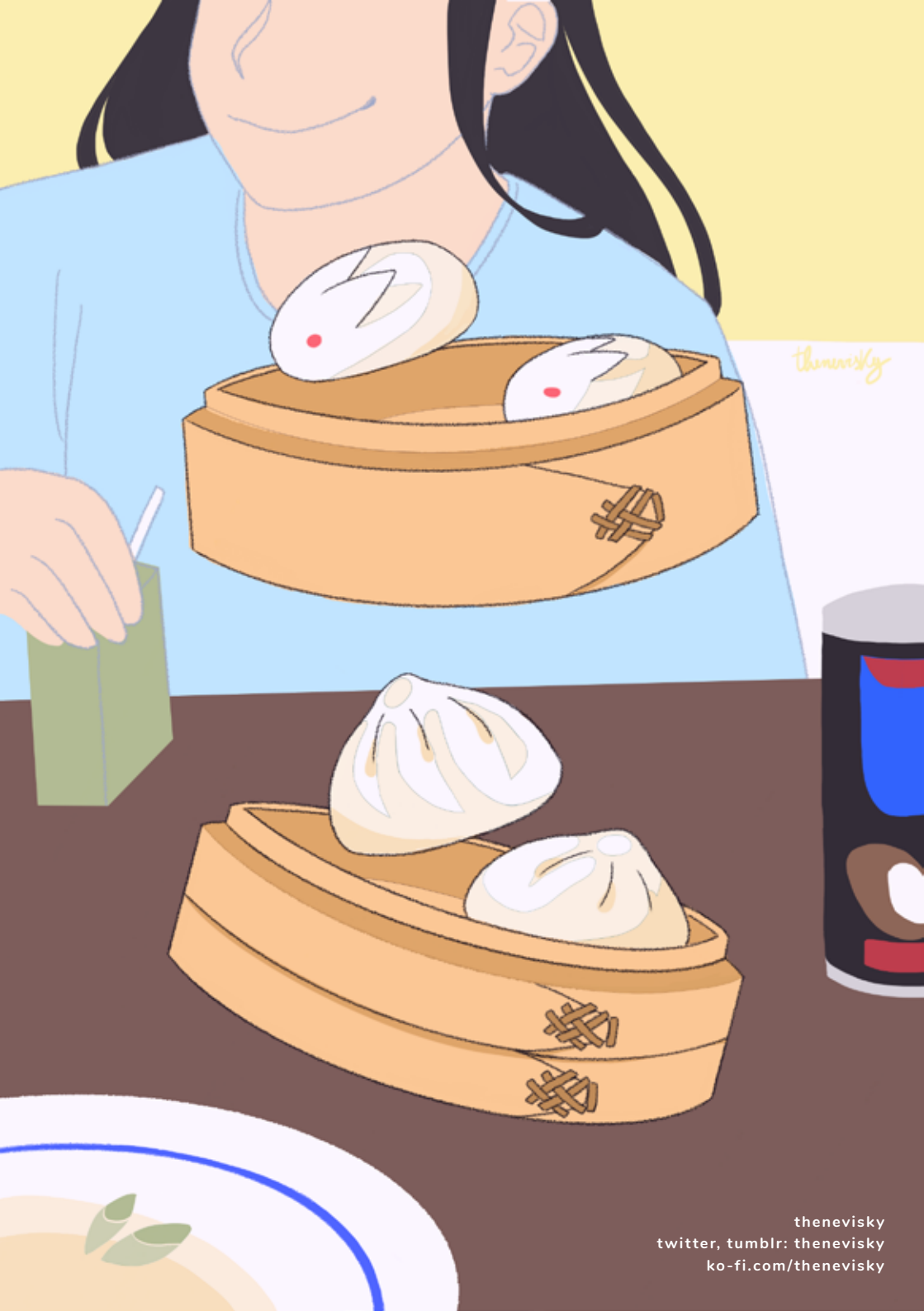
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# Butter and Crumbs

Runic
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"Okay, I've got this," Kira whispered to herself. She could barely hear her voice over the music playing throughout her apartment. The music certainly was at a decent level, loud enough to dance to, but low enough that she would not be annoying any neighbors. She definitely should have heard herself over it. But Sunny seemed to think everything was just fine. He was chirping and bobbing right along to the music on his perch across the apartment. He caught her staring at him and flapped his wings, whistling a high note to her. Kira did not fight her urge to smile, dipping into a couple bobs along with him.

And, all right, Kira had to admit her mind was wandering from the task at hand.

"Okay!" Kira repeated, placing her hands on the countertop. "We can do this, Sunny. It's just bread. Sure, it's bread for Cleo, and we've never really baked before, but that should only make us more determined. And now I'm sounding like some crazy person rambling, aren't I? Let's just read the recipe and get on with it."

Said recipe was written on a laminated binder page, Kira's great grandmother's recipe lovingly typed out by her father years ago. Her father had given her a copy of the cookbook he had organized from the old recipes when she moved out on her own, but Kira had never even cracked it open since. Standing before it now, realizing the love and care that had gone into its construction, she hoped she could do it justice.

Kira read through the recipe one more time, her total count probably somewhere in the fifties, and with a deep breath got to work. She had all the ingredients listed before her ready to go, so there was no longer any excuse. She poured water into a pot and set it to boil, adding the packet of yeast once it began to bubble.

After the five minutes, Kira could see no indication that the yeast had activated. “Did I already mess up?” Kira muttered as she stared forlornly at the mixture.

Kira pulled her phone from her pocket and searched, ‘how to tell if yeast is activated?’ In a few seconds she had her answer. “Ah, yes. Yes, I certainly did mess up. I’m glad I made sure to get extra yeast just in case.”

Who knew that yeast died when put in boiling hot water? Well, bakers for one. Her father, Cleo, and probably a whole bunch more people. Silver linings, she had learned something new today.

“Sorry little guy,” Kira apologized to the yeast/water mixture as she dumped it out. She cleaned the bowl and tried again, this time sticking a meat thermometer into the water to check the temperature before adding the new packet of yeast.

After five more minutes of waiting, the majority of the yeast had fallen to the bottom of the bowl and Kira could see small bubbles forming on the surface. She could definitely smell it now as well.

“Yes! Yes! We did it, Sunny!” Kira shouted, pumping her arms into the air. She took a turn around the small kitchen, dancing her triumph. Sunny chirped and bounced on his perch right along with her, up until a crash stopped her. Kira stared down

at the fallen bowl, the mess now covering her tiled floor. The bowl did not suddenly right itself in sympathy with her pleading gaze. “Good thing I got a lot extra, Sunny,” Kira said with a sigh, arming herself with a roll of paper towels. Sunny tweeted sadly, a worried note that caused Kira to go over to his cage and reassure him.

Third time was the charm, she told herself as she headed back to the kitchen. Kira allowed herself one fist pump before turning to the rest of the ingredients. “One step down. Now all the others follow.”

The other steps did not seem so bad. Kira mixed the dry ingredients as instructed, before adding in the liquid. It probably should not have taken her as long as it did, but Kira was determined to get it right, and slowed herself down by continuously checking the recipe time and time again.

The worst part was waiting. Kira poked the dough she had brought together before placing a kitchen towel over it. “Please, please rise,” she begged the dough. If it did not, Kira would not have enough time for another attempt before Cleo arrived. She threw herself down onto her small couch, desperately hoping for this present to work out. Cleo had done so much for her, from helping her with research and editing papers, to putting her foot down and dragging Kira out for a coffee when she really should not have been looking at a screen any longer. Kira was not sure if she ever would have finished her master’s program if Cleo had not decided to ask her if she was okay that first day in the computer lab. Granted, Kira had said she was fine, but as her login was not even working, it was obvious she had been far from.

A timer buzzed, dragging Kira out of her reverie with a startled

shock. An hour had already passed! How had she gone and allowed that to happen?

Kira scrambled to her feet, nearly managing to hit the edge of the coffee table on her way. “I’m okay!” she assured Sunny when he whistled a concerned note. She briefly wondered how she was always such a disaster with things like this, but then she was in front of the dough and that really required her focus right now, rather than any personal shortcomings.

“Okay, the next step said to punch it,” Kira instructed herself. This was the part she had most dreaded when she first read the recipe. A small whine escaped her throat when she pulled back the towel. The dough had at least gotten larger, although she was not sure if it had exactly doubled. Hopefully she had left it to rise long enough. “This seems so mean,” she murmured, raising a fist over the bowl. Kira took a deep breath and brought her fist down, with nowhere near enough force to actually be defined as a punch.

Kira just managed to keep the curse on the tip of her tongue at the sound of a key turning in her lock. She rushed over to where she had left her phone on the counter, noticing much too late that she had missed a text message from Cleo saying she was on her way. Ah, well, that certainly complicated things a bit.

“Good afternoon, darling!” Cleo called, throwing open the door and catching sight of Kira behind the kitchen counter that separated it from the rest of the apartment. Her smile was sunshine bright, her raven afro a cloud of neatly kept curls around her head. She caught on immediately to Kira’s gaping mouth, the corner of her lips quirking up in a smile. “Am I that gorgeous that I have stolen away your breath?”

Yes, Kira's mind screamed. And oh, okay, that was growing stronger every time she saw Cleo.

"Or," Cleo continued, "did someone just now look at their phone?" Cleo slid off her shoes and shook her head, shoulders shaking off her office jacket before throwing it onto the end of Kira's couch. Kira loved how Cleo's sky blue blouse and pencil skirt — while seemingly at home in the corporate world in which she worked — just made her feel like Cleo: put together and approachable, someone other people looked up to.

"Uh," came Kira's intelligible answer, emphasized when she held up her own phone. "I didn't even finish reading your text yet."

"Of course you didn't," Cleo half laughed, more amusement than chastisement. "What had you so distracted this time?"

"I was hoping to have it done before you came over," Kira offered as she presented the bowl.

Cleo blinked down at the dough inside, then back up at Kira. "You're baking? For me?"

"Attempting to," Kira clarified. "The first round didn't go so well."

"The yeast?" Cleo asked, nodding along when Kira silently acknowledged her guess. "The yeast gets everyone the first time. But it seems to have risen nicely. You haven't punched it down yet, have you?"

"It's so mean!" Kira protested. "I thought cooking was all about love!"

Cleo threw her head back and laughed, bright and clear. "Aw, Kira, I don't mean to laugh at you. It's just, well, that was so you." She took a deep breath, letting it out with the last of

her laughter. “It’s necessary, my dear. There’s a whole science behind it.”

“I’m an engineer, not a chemist,” Kira muttered. “Still seems mean.” But with that, she took her own breath and brought her fist down. It actually felt satisfying to have the dough yield beneath her hand, to watch Cleo nod her approval and see that spark of pride in her eyes.

“Do you want my help, or do you think you’ve got the next steps on your own?” Cleo asked.

Kira hesitated. She had planned on making this as a gift for Cleo, and she hated to ask her to do any work. But on the other hand, the idea of baking with Cleo was making her heart thump heavily against her ribcage. If she were not careful, it might very well escape and tell Cleo exactly what she was feeling. “If you wouldn’t mind helping,” Kira eventually answered. “Just so that you can have some bread before you leave tonight.”

“Mmmm,” Cleo hummed. “I can never say no to bread. It’s so good. Okay then, let’s get this rolled out.”

Cleo went to work with her usual efficiency, instructing Kira as they went. As much as Kira was grateful to her great grandmother’s recipe for getting her started, having Cleo beside her to show her made things so much easier. By the time they placed the dough in the loaf pan, the newest addition to Kira’s kitchen, Kira was feeling much more confident in the whole process. They chatted while they waited, eventually turning into Kira challenging Cleo to a game and booting up her console. They paused only to finally put the bread into the oven, and then returned to their game. Kira’s cheeks ached with laughter and smiles when the timer finally went off.

Kira followed Cleo into the kitchen, eagerly looking over her shoulder as she pulled the bread from the oven. Cleo tapped at it, Kira unsure what she was listening or feeling for, but the curt nod Cleo gave made her hopeful. “It’s done.”

“Yay!” Kira shouted, throwing her arms around Cleo, who laughed and squeezed her back. From his cage, Sunny whistled happily along with her. “Can we eat it now?”

“Uh, of course!” Cleo was already turning around to dig in Kira’s fridge for butter. “I don’t care that it’s way too many carbs. Hot, fresh bread is too good to resist.” She sighed happily as Kira cut into the loaf.

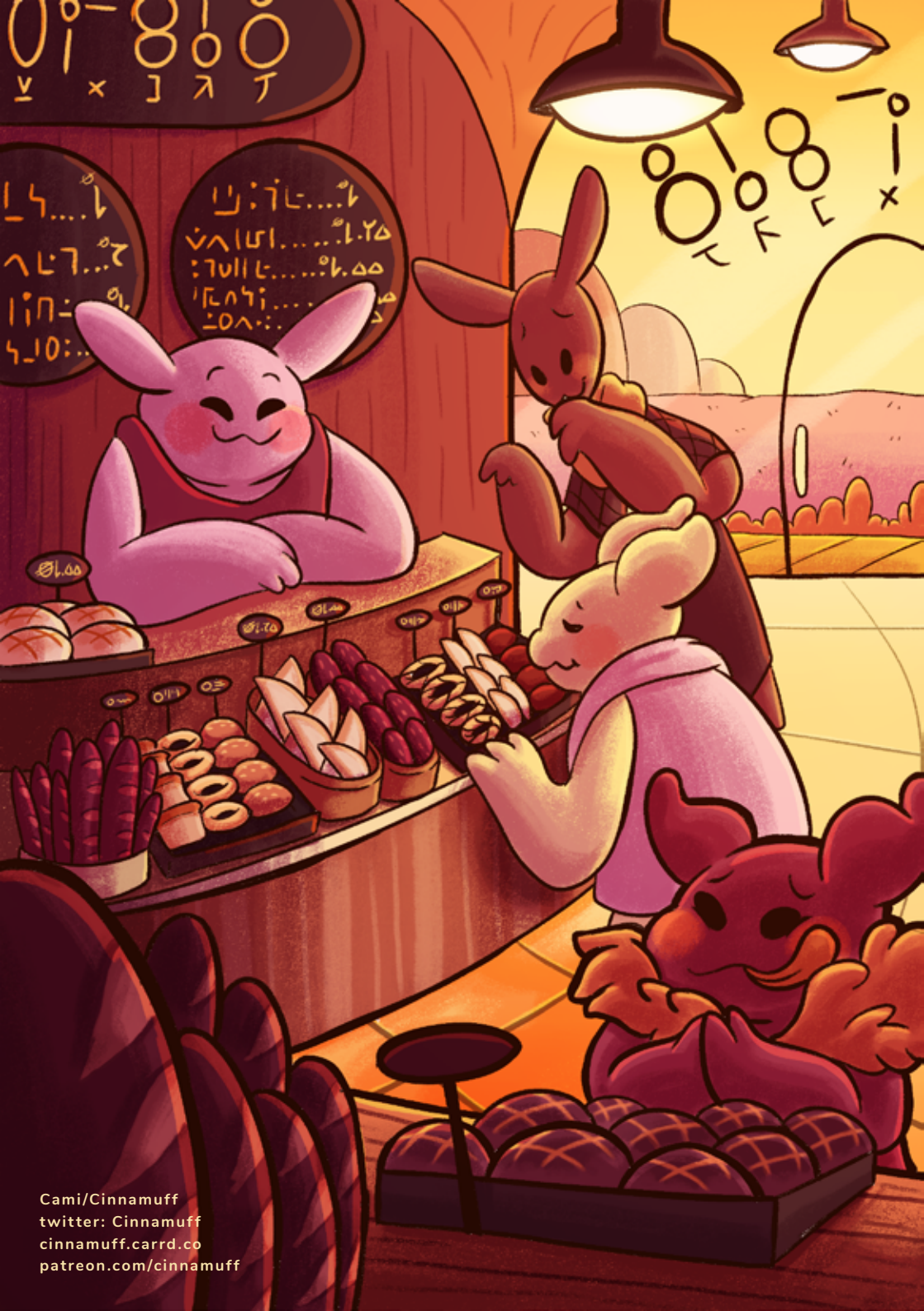
Kira waited with a bated breath as Cleo buttered the slice she cut off and raised the bread to her mouth. This was the moment of truth, to see if all her hard work had paid off. Cleo chewed, purposely keeping her face neutral and turning away from Kira. “Oh, come on,” Kira protested, trying to duck around to see Cleo’s face. “That’s not fair!”

Cleo responded by turning back toward her, the move positioning them rather close to each other, only held apart by the slice of bread between them. The smile fell from Cleo’s lips, replaced by some other look Kira could not place. Well, more like she did not want to name the rising hope that threatened to swell within her. “Slightly chewy, but very good for a first attempt,” Cleo answered honestly. “You’ve got promise.”

Kira swallowed hard against the giddiness that swirled inside her, mixed with fear and longing, and so many other happy emotions she was not entirely sure what all was in the mix. “Perhaps you can come over and bake with me again sometime.”

Cleo's eyes softened and she nodded, raising the slice of bread up for Kira to take a bite. Cleo was right, it was slightly chewy, but warm and soft and delicious. "I would enjoy that."

When Cleo kissed her, it tasted of butter and bread crumbs. Kira never had more motivation to learn the art of bread baking than right at that moment.



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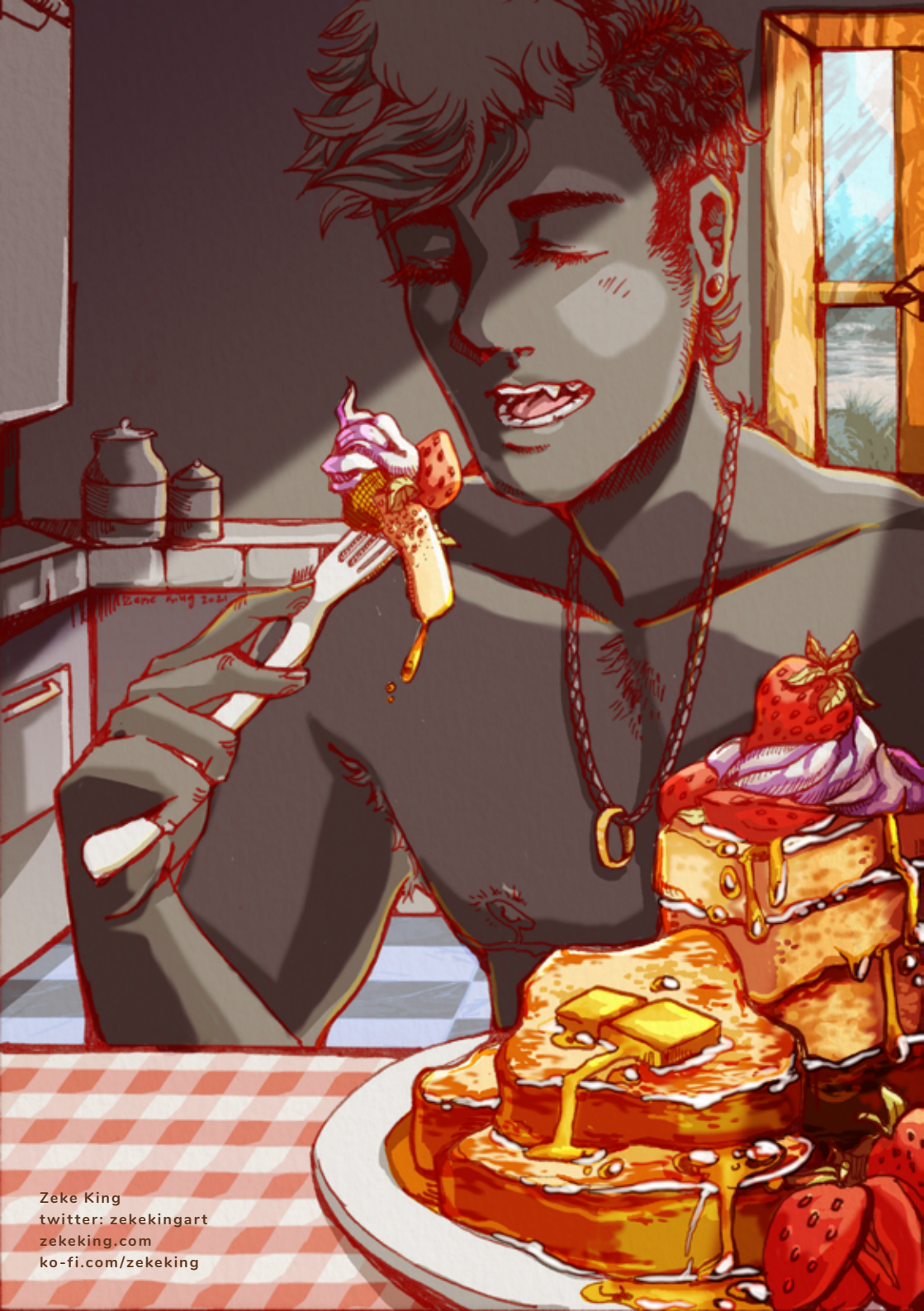

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# HAINAN TOAST

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# Breads of Koattu

Koattu is a fantasy world inside a planet, with the Sun-Moon rotating in the center of the sphere.

Due to all inhabitants being able to see the other lands when they look up at the sky, there is a big sense of community, and among one of the most important parts of any culture (even more important than here on Earth) is cooking, baking, and especially bread.

Let's take a look at some breads from different parts of Koattu.

## SCORED BREAD
(Originated in Aëtedu, spreading to other continents)

As one of the staples of Koattian bread, scored breads can be made with almost any available flour. A simple leavened bread with aesthetic and functional cuts (scores) made on the top.

Traditionally, the scored decorations on top reflect the cereal it is made of. Pictured on the side, the traditional depictions of the main cereals used for this bread.

## YULE KNOT
(Central Aëtedu)

Celebrated during the days of winter, when the coldgrass in the glaciers of Uffonu is so active that the cold has spread to the other continents, Yule is a rite of rebirth, remembering the events of the year, and hoping for another year of happiness.

Waiting for the coldgrass to recede once again, people in central Aëtedu bake these knotted crowns of dough. Made with wheat flour and dipped in light lye water, these Yule knots are spiced with ginger, allspice and nutmeg*, and sprinkled with cumin seeds before being baked.

*The actual spices that they use don't exist on Earth, so they have been substituted for the equivalents in taste.

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## LITTLE BREAD KNIGHTS
(South East Aëtedu)

These traditional Eddumian sweet buns are extremely famous all around Koattu, and although they can now be found almost all along the year, they used to be treats given to children during the summer or autumn festivities (depending on the region).

The name comes from the shape they take, as the cuts made to the dough makes it rise and take the shape of a round, funny armored knight. Many are decorated with extra cuts and sugar glazes. Fillings range from chocolate to meringue, jam and even some savoury ones like ham or cheese.

## FLOWER BREAD
(North Aëtedu, East Udou)

These festive breads from Mëtumou and the surrounding regions are usually made for big events like weddings, Yule celebrations and Spring festivals.

They take the form of one or two tiered cakes, but they are completely made of different bread doughs with different flours, spices and ingredient ratios to produce highly elaborate decorations and effects, ranging from local flowers to lacing designs that change depending on the town it comes from.

Here is an example of a Flowerbread from Dannou, capital city of Mëtumou.

## DOUBLEDOUGH
(East and North Uffonu, South Aëtedu)

These buns, sometimes fried, most often baked, combine two kinds of leavened dough. A central disk of one type of dough is covered by two other disks of another kind, usually of contrasting color. After baking and puffing out, the central dough can be seen through the cuts on the outer disks.

Doubledough originated from ruined noble families that, wanting to appear wealthier, used the effect to disguise lower quality bread. Nowadays it's purely aesthetic, though different cities have their own "official" combination of doubledoughs.

## SNOW NAANS
(West and North Uffonu, South East Udou)

The stamped designs on Snow naan come from a form of showing who made these flatbreads, usually marking the seal of the family that owned the oven.

The name, Snow Naan, comes from the fact that it uses a portion of coldgrass flour for its dough*, giving them a "cold" aftertaste.

*This can be substituted for lightly infusing the water to be used with some peppermint.

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# The Hunter's Bread

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The sun had not completely set by the time Demetri finished setting up his camp. The leaves of the bushes and trees around him were bathed in the warm orange light of its rays, but he knew they would soon be gone and was grateful that he finished with time to spare. Traveling to Isonwood usually took only a day, and he would have made it to the guild by dusk, had it not been for Cyril insisting he stay a little longer that morning.

And Demetri had found himself incapable of telling his lover no. He told himself he'd leave an hour later than he planned as he bundled back under the warmth of their blankets and back into Cyril's arms. He added another hour when Cyril insisted on making him a *proper* breakfast before leaving. Another hour was added when breakfast turned into Cyril baking bread for Demetri to pack as rations for his trip. It was almost afternoon by the time Demetri had finished readying his horse Hickory for the journey. The delay had ensured he wasn't going to make it to Isonwood before it got dark and that he would certainly need to camp out that night.

Demetri found he didn't particularly care. Had it been anybody else or any other reason, he probably would have been annoyed by the delay. But Cyril was often brought down by Demetri's long trips and was always worried because as strong and capable as Demetri was, monster hunting carried its own risks no matter the level of skill. Demetri missed him dearly when he was away as well, so he favored the extra time spent together over getting to the city.

He got a fire started before the sun completely set, and by the time the stars were dark he had unwrapped his rations and began to get a stew ready over the open flames. Stews were usually the easiest dish to make when camping, in his opinion. He let it simmer in a pot as he ensured he left enough water for Hickory and fed the eight-legged steed. He put up his usual protective measures around the camp — buried bits of silver, runes carved into trees, and salt sprinkled around the perimeter — before sitting down and eating dinner.

The stew is warm and fulfilling and will do for the night. He's never been the best at cooking. Competent, yes, but his skill was limited to making something edible and sustaining. The bread Cyril packed for him really stood out against his mediocre soup. The small loaves of focaccia were one of Cyril's favorites to make and one of Demetri's favorites to eat, meaning it was something that was commonly made in their home.

Demetri had come to associate the taste of this bread with home. If he closed his eyes right now, he could probably place himself back home in his kitchen rather than his temporary camp. He could put himself back to where he was this morning, leaning against the counter and reading the local paper aloud as Cyril kneaded the dough. Cyril always made reading the paper an entertaining morning ritual, with scoffs and hums and outbursts as Demetri attempted to read the news with a neutral tone. He could put himself back to pretending to pout when Cyril teased that he couldn't reach the high shelves on his own, having to climb the pantry shelves to reach the olive oil that he was asked to grab. Demetri was confident in his skills to know that his *perfectly average* height was nothing to feel inferior about, but boy did Cyril enjoy teasing him about

it anyways. He could put himself back at the breakfast table, enjoying fresh bread and eggs they got from their neighbor and strawberries the two had picked the day prior.

But opening his eyes returned him back to the present, sitting by the fire away from home. He sighed and bit a chunk out of the bread.

—

Demetri stays at the local inn in Isonwood the next night after receiving information about the hunt from the guild. It's a simple enough case of a hellhound terrorizing a small farming village to the north, not too far from Fourth Arrow. The average traveler would probably get there within four days. With a Sleipnir Steed, Demetri knew he could make it in two.

He eats dinner that night at the inn's tavern, deciding to save the rations he has and take advantage of a warm meal when it is guaranteed.

It's not a bad meal. It's a chowder of some kind with a dinner roll to accompany it. It's sustainable. It'll get him through until his next meal.

The tavern is loud with travelers and drunken parties. It's fairly crowded. He can't help but feel lonely and out of place.

He saves the dinner roll for last. When he finishes, he still feels a bit empty.

—

As expected, Demetri is able to finish half of his trip within a day thanks to Hickory. He values his rest and safety and makes plans to set up camp before the sunset begins to color the

sky. He runs into two fellow monster hunters when searching for a place to camp, identified by the guild patches on their coat sleeves. The pair is friendly enough, and Demetri takes them up on their offer to camp together for the night. It makes setting up the protective measures go by faster, and soon they are feeding their steeds and getting ready to make their own dinners.

Demetri is secretly relieved when they don't offer to share rations. He feels like a selfish child, hoarding his favorite foods in a manner that his mother would scold him for. As nice as the other hunters are though, he doesn't really know if he's willing to share the bread Cyril made for him.

The meal is nice enough. The two had made a vegetable stew of sorts while Demetri cooked some ham he had packed. They exchange stories of their travels and their hunts. He learns they're both specialists in dealing with the undead, and listens to their tales of wraiths and poltergeists with interest. He shares his own stories of dealing with the dark forces of the abyssal planes, mostly hellhound packs and imps.

It reminds him of the excited chatter that came with family meals — of holiday meals, when all of his family and Cyril's family gathered at the large dining table of his childhood home and would swap stories from the year with enthusiasm, and of festivals held during his childhood, when his cousins and siblings would squish together around small tables while scarfing down sweet buns. He can't help but think of his town's local tavern, where he's spent countless evenings dining with neighbors and friends and sharing similar stories to the ones he swaps with the fellow hunters by the fire.

When his mother returned from her travels when he was a boy,

she would share the tales of the beasts she had slaughtered and how she had been successful while tending to her weapons as he listened intently. Demetri took every detail to memory when she talked. The one point that stuck with him the most had nothing to do with rituals or monsters though. He had simply asked how she felt being gone for so long sometimes.

"It's lonely," she had answered with a sad smile. "But it's less so when I find someone kind to share a meal with."

As he unwraps one of the loaves of bread from Cyril, he can't help but agree with her. He takes a bite. The bread hasn't grown stale, but it's not as fresh as the one he had eaten two nights prior. It still warms his heart as he chews and thinks about who made it for him.

The other hunters are sharing a loaf of bread with their own dinner. Demetri wonders if theirs was made by someone who cares for them just like his was.

He certainly isn't lonely tonight, but he can't help but wish Cyril was by his side as well. As pleasant as his current company is, he's glad to have the familiarity that is Cyril's bread to pair with his dinner.

—

The hunt went smoothly. Demetri had dealt with a fair number of hellhounds in the past, and this one was far from the worst he had seen. The beast was put to rest, and the townspeople were relieved and safe once more.

He had done his best to turn down their attempts at payment — after all, his pay was granted to him by the guild which they had already handed gold to when they placed the bounty — but

they refused to let him go without giving him something. There was no escaping their generosity, so he took payment in the form of a free night at the inn and some food for the travel home.

The couple that ran the inn were sweet. They're young, and they can't seem to let each other out of sight or reach for more than a minute. Demetri can't help but smile at the cheer they seem to bring. It reminds him all too much of the honeymoon phase of his and Cyril's relationship. It's a happiness he associates with the first time Cyril tried to teach him to bake, or the first time Demetri showed Cyril how to string a bow.

The dinner they serve at the inn that night is a lovely roast. The company of the townsfolk is happy and upbeat. He's happy about it, but it makes him wish for the company of his own family. The job is over though, he thinks happily as he eats his meal. Only a few more days until he'd be eating dinner in his own home again.

The bread he eats with dinner isn't as filling as he would like, but remembering he will get to see Cyril in a few days eases that empty feeling.

—

It was Demetri's pride that was to blame for the accident. He knew of the storm and yet still believed he and Hickory would be perfectly fine traveling.

It turns out that as strong as his steed was, even Hickory was capable of slipping when the path was turned to mud and the winds were so strong. He lost his footing and the two had made a fall down the slick hillside into the river. Demetri was lucky that he hadn't been crushed in the fall and that Hickory had

gained no injuries as well. The waters were rough, but luckily both managed to get to the riverbank safely after the fall. Traveling some distance allowed him to find a cave that would fit both he and Hickory comfortably while shielding them from the rain.

After shedding himself of his waterlogged clothing he checks over Hickory to double-check that he didn't injure himself in the fall before going through his belongings to see if anything was lost. Luckily his sword and daggers were still packed safely away, though it seemed his bow and quiver had come loose and were dragged away in the river. His pack with his tent and other camping supplies had been securely strapped onto the saddle, but his bag with miscellaneous supplies and rations seemed to have been misplaced.

He groaned as he took a seat by the fire he had started. He was safe, thank the gods, but this situation proved to be a nuisance. Waiting for his supplies to properly dry, which he couldn't do until the rain let up, would most likely add an extra day to his journey. Doing an inventory check proved that most of his texts and valuable items of his trade were not lost, but important components such as silver and some expensive herbs were now gone. That meant a good chunk of his pay he would receive for this hunt would need to go to restocking his supplies.

He was the most disappointed about his rations. Some dried meat and vegetables survived. But the chicken and sausages he was given from the townspeople were gone.

So were the remaining focaccia loaves from Cyril.

He groaned, dragging a hand down his face as he slumped backwards onto the floor of the cave. It was bad enough he was going to be away from home longer than planned. But now

the one thing he had to ease his homesickness was gone.

Losing food seemed like a petty, childish thing to get upset over, Demetri would admit. After all, he still had some rations. And if he hadn't, he was perfectly capable of hunting or foraging for food. Lost bread was nothing compared to the bow and quiver, the grams of silver, and the herbs that were whisked away.

But it wasn't *any* bread, he thought as he reasoned against the part of him that felt foolish for his fit. It was from Cyril. It was from *home*. No matter the travel, no matter the hunt, he knew at the end of the day he had something in his bag that could momentarily ease his homesickness.

He threw together a stew for dinner. It was enough to warm him up and keep him from getting ill from his dip into the river earlier. He rested against Hickory as he ate, staring at the flames of his campfire. Spending the night in a cave waiting out a storm was already enough to make him feel isolated. Lacking bread to pair with his meal made the lonely feeling dig further into his chest.

—

The first thing Demetri did after receiving his reward from the guild in Isonwood is replace the goods he lost in the river. He didn't sleep well the last two nights without the ingredients to set proper protection measures. The newly acquired silver and herbs in his pockets assured him that his last night on the road would be a peaceful one. He picked up a new bow but figured he would just make arrows once he returned home.

The bakery was his last stop before he hit the road. He really didn't frequent bakeries other than Cyril's, so walking into the one he had found in the downtown area of Isonwood felt odd.

It certainly smelled like what a bakery should smell like — flour and yeast and the faint scent of herbs and spices. He knew, logically, that there was no way it would smell the same as Cyril's bakery or their kitchen back home. Despite this, disappointment settled in his gut. There was bread lining the display case, but it unnerved him that it was arranged in a way he wasn't used to. He had enough common sense not to start rearranging the display to match Cyril's usual arrangements. After all, that would be fairly rude of him. Shapes of the different loaves of bread put him off — the focaccia was too large, the sourdough too small, the rye too round.

The baker was nice. She beamed as she helped Demetri, speaking in a friendly tone. He appreciated her kindness, but it just dug in how he'd rather see a different baker's smile at the moment. He bought a loaf of sourdough and went on his way.

When he sat down to eat that evening, he noted the bread was of good quality. It wasn't bad bread. In fact, it was very good, possibly the second-best he'd had. He decides that should another bread-related emergency come along during his travels, he will probably turn to that bakery again.

It's his last night on the road, meaning his last night away from Cyril for this trip. That fact makes him feel significantly less lonesome.

—

It was late in the afternoon by the time Demetri returned to his hometown. His neighbors waved at him as they passed by their home. They were luckily used to his haste to get back home after missions and didn't consider his rushed greeting as rude.

Smoke rose from the chimney when he rode up to the home. He

was in luck — as much as he wanted to see Cyril, he didn't know if he would be able to coax Hickory into a trip into town to the bakery once he unloaded all the gear. As he passed the kitchen window, he couldn't help but smile when he looked in and saw Cyril piling their kitchen counter with baking ingredients.

Hickory let out a loud neigh, which caught Cyril's attention. Demetri barked out a laugh when Cyril accidentally dropped a bag of flour onto the floor in his rush to get to the door. By the time Demetri had dismounted Hickory, Cyril was running out the door and heading straight to him.

His boyfriend smelled just like the focaccia loaves he had been gifted when he crashed into Demetri. The rosemary was so overwhelming that he wondered if the dried leaves were scattered in his curls. Peeking through the kitchen door, he thought he saw more unbaked loaves on the counter.

Demetri held Cyril close, cherishing his presence after being away for so long. The loaves of focaccia would always help him in the lonelier moments of his travels, but nothing beats coming home to the baker who made them.

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# IT'S DANGEROUS TO GO ALONE!
# TAKE ONE OF THESE.

Power: +20
Dexterity: +40
Tastiness: +100

Power: +30
Dexterity: +30
Tastiness: +100

Power: +40
Dexterity: +20
Tastiness: +100

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# Garlic

Moonie
ao3: plumesvertes

Olive inhaled deeply as she entered the bakery. She wasn't sure which she liked better: the subtle zing of magic in the air that sizzled against her skin, or the intoxicating aroma of freshly baked bread. Even after weeks of working here, her mouth still watered at the start of every shift.

"Morning, Olive," said Agnes, the head baker. The other members of her coven echoed her greeting.

Her fellow witches were already hard at work. Hilda was in charge of mixing the dough and enchanting it to self-knead. Bonnie, their resident time witch, cast a spell that made the dough proof instantly ("Proof in a poof," as she liked to say). Rosalinda handled everything that didn't require flour, from melting chocolate to make the decadent filling of *pain au chocolat*, to boiling apricots and cranberries to put in their fruit bread, to brewing coffee and potions.

Olive's role, however, was to serve their customers. She was happy to be a part of the team, but she wished she could be back there with the rest of her coven, using actual charms instead of just her "charming smile". Agnes said it was only a matter of time before Olive's witchcraft was advanced enough to join the others, but some days Olive felt like she'd never reach that point. Some days it was all she could do to fly her broom to work without crashing.

Just as she'd finished her first sale of the day, Bonnie emerged from the kitchen. She brushed herself off, filling the air with plumes of flour. "We just got a call from the old warlock who lives in the woods. Apparently he's just been bitten by a vampire and is having a devil of a time recovering. He wants us to send him a feel-better basket."

"And you want me to go?" Olive asked, more a statement than a question.

"Well, it is a slow morning." Bonnie gestured to the empty seating area. "It shouldn't take that long."

"You know time magic. Can't you just...speed it up a little?"

"Ha, never heard that one before." The older witch rolled her eyes and handed Olive a note from a pad of paper. "Here's everything you need to put in the basket."

Olive gathered what she needed and grabbed her broom from the closet. She grumbled as she left, but it was a nice day for a broom ride. The old warlock would probably leave her a handsome tip - a vial of one of his latest potions, if she was lucky. Maybe delivery wouldn't turn out to be the chore she'd thought it would be.

*This is so much more of a chore than I thought it would be*, Olive thought to herself a mere twenty minutes later. A flock of birds had started following her, attracted by the smell of the bread, and Olive had flown faster to outpace them. Unfortunately, that caused the basket to fly off the tail end of the broom, and in her infinite foolishness, Olive dove after it. Now she lay battered on the ground, grass stains on her robes, and a crack in her broomstick that rendered it useless, not even fit to sweep the leaves on which she'd crash-landed. At least the basket was

still intact, although there was a part of her that wanted to vent her frustration and stomp both it and its crusty contents into smithereens.

She had more self-control than that, though, and more pride as both a witch and an employee. Olive wasn't going to let a minor setback like crashing and breaking the only mode of transportation she had stop her from making her delivery. She marched onwards, into the woods and through the trees.

After passing that one rock that looked strangely like a bagel for the third time, Olive finally admitted to herself that she had no idea where she was going. She was just about to give up and shout into the void for help, when-

"Are you lost, miss?" asked a voice from the shadows.

Olive didn't know whether to be relieved or terrified. "Who's there?" she called, her voice only shaking a little.

The source of the voice stepped out of the shadows - literally, his body materializing where only seconds ago there was nothing but air. The man was clad in an ink-black suit trimmed by a ruby sash and a white cravat, unmarred by even a speck of dirt. He extended a hand. "Name's Dmitri. Pleased to meet you."

Olive took a few wary steps before deciding that, out of all the strange fellows one could encounter in the woods, Dmitri was far from the worst. "I'm Olive." She shook his hand. Despite the balmy weather, his fingers were colder than ice. There was a moment of confusion, then horror as Olive yanked her hand away. "You're a vampire!" she exclaimed.

"I am indeed," Dmitri noted. "And you're lost."

“Well, yes,” Olive conceded. “But you’re a vampire!”

“Really? I hadn’t noticed,” Dmitri said drily.

“Don’t act so nonchalant about all this. You know you’re not supposed to be here - during the day, I mean. But while we’re on the subject, why are you lurking about in the middle of the woods?”

“First of all, vampires live in these woods. If anyone’s a lurker here, it’s you. Second of all, it’s a common misconception that vampires burn up in daylight. Rather, we need darkness for our bodies to exist. We can walk around at high noon as long as it’s under the cover of shadow. And there’s plenty of that under all these trees.”

Olive scoffed. “I’ll buy that for now, but how did you appear out of nothing? I’ve never seen any vampire do that.”

“You’ve never seen us precisely because we usually choose to remain invisible. You answered your own question.”

“Well,” Olive started, preparing to make another incredulous remark, then realizing that she had no more objections. “Anyway. Now that we’ve cleared all that up, why don’t you help me get un-lost?”

A smile graced Dmitri’s pale face. “Where are you trying to go?”

“The warlock’s tower. I’m sure you know the one.”

Dmitri nodded. “Indeed I do. It’s,” he paused, looking around until he found a point of reference, “that way, just past that willow. About an hour’s walk from here.”

"You wouldn't happen to be the vampire that bit him, would you?" Olive asked, panic suddenly flaring up inside her. If the answer was yes, she may not be getting out of these woods alive.

"No!" he protested, his calm demeanor slipping for the first time since they'd met (which, to be fair, was only a few minutes ago). "I don't eat humans. Only animals, and the occasional human food. Human-made food, that is. Again, I don't eat humans."

She felt bad for him, but what could she possibly say to make this man feel better that wouldn't ring hollow? "Good to know," Olive said, internally wincing at that fact that she'd just called the existential plight of vampirism 'good'. "Thank you for the directions, and for the...impromptu lesson on vampires," she continued. She considered shaking his hand again, but decided against it, opting instead to bow awkwardly. "I'll be off now."

A few paces later, she turned around. Dmitri was still standing in the same spot, looking straight at her. "Or..." she sighed, "you could come with me, if you want."

Dmitri flashed a fangy grin. "I'd be delighted!"

They walked in companionable silence for the better part of an hour, occasionally chatting about Dmitri's vampire clan, Olive's coven, and the kind of books and music they liked (she'd definitely have to check out some of the classics Dmitri mentioned). It was surprisingly comfortable, the only downside being the furtive glances Dmitri would cast in her direction when he probably thought Olive wasn't paying attention.

Sometime along the way, the cool morning weather became blazing daytime heat. It was sweltering, even under the thick tree cover. Olive piled her long hair into a dollop on top of her head and tucked it under her witch's hat. Her neck was cooler

now, but how much longer would this go on? According to Dmitri's directions, they should've arrived at the tower already.

"Hey, vampy boy. What's taking us so long?" Olive asked.

Dmitri stopped walking. "I'm sorry. I should've been honest with you earlier. I'm just so hungry." Olive tensed at the admission, although she had suspected as much. "That means I can't move as fast or think as clearly about where I'm going, but there is another reason I've been purposely delaying us..."

"You want me to let you drink my blood!" Olive cried, hands instinctively rising to cover her neck.

"No! Again - I don't eat humans! I wanted a piece of bread, that's all."

"Oh." Now she felt really awful. "I have to save most of these for the warlock, but - nevermind, what am I saying? Of course you can have one." She dislodged the basket of baked treats from her arm and motioned for Dmitri to come look through it with her.

"This one that's sticking out of the basket is a bespelled baguette. It's crusty but airy, delicious, and heightens your magic resistance for twelve hours after you eat it." Dmitri leaned in to sniff the baguette, considered for a moment, then shook his head. Olive opened the basket to continue. "Here we've got a blessed batard." She pointed to an oval-shaped loaf that smelled enticingly of rosemary. "That's supposed to aid in healing vampire bites, which is great for the old man, but probably not for you. This one here," Olive pointed to three slices the color of oak wood, "is rejuvenating rye. It's good for your health in general, but again, I'm not sure how it would work on the undead." She tapped the far end of the basket, sending some of the smaller

breads sliding into view. “These are croissants with different fillings. There’s no magical name for them. They’re just amazing. And these-”

“I’ll take a croissant,” Dmitri interrupted.

“Excellent choice. Which one do you want?”

“Do you have raspberry?”

“I should have known you’d go for the juicy red filling,” Olive laughed, handing him the croissant. After taking a bite, Dmitri made a face and started gagging. “Oh come on, I didn’t think it was that bad of a joke! Wait - oh no, oh gods, are you okay?”

Olive was at his side in a second. Despite her pleas for Dmitri to tell her what was wrong, he was only able to manage incoherent splutters. It belatedly occurred to Olive that she had a bezoar in the pocket of her robe for emergencies. Hopefully her medical textbooks were correct about the bezoar’s effectiveness as a universal antidote. With trembling hands, she all but shoved it into Dmitri’s mouth.

A few agonizing seconds later, he regained his power of speech. “Olive,” he began, making a face at the unpleasant aftertaste of the bezoar. “Is there garlic bread in that basket?”

Her stomach dropped. “...Yes. I’m sorry. I should have thought of that.”

Dmitri munched on the raspberry croissant as he recovered his breath. “It’s not your fault,” he sighed, waving his hand. Olive was glad for even the small gesture of forgiveness. “I’m honestly more upset at the reminder that I can no longer have

garlic bread. It used to be one of my favorites, before...well, you know."

She nodded, relieved beyond words that he was alright. In the moment, she was all smiles and reassurances. But in her mind, a plan was forming.

—

That night, Olive, Dmitri, and the old warlock who lived in the woods dined at the bakery to celebrate the triumphs of the day. They were seated outdoors, of course, and had extinguished the candle at their table for Dmitri's sake. The two men were splitting a bottle of wine the exact color of blood, and Olive was enjoying a martini garnished with two of her namesakes on a toothpick. And in the center of the table, for all three of them to share, was a basket of garlic bread.

Instead of accepting a tip from the old warlock once she'd finally delivered the goods, Olive had asked him to help her devise a spell that would allow vampires to safely consume garlic. The two of them came up with an enchantment to be cast on the vampire which essentially allowed them to process garlic as they would blood. Dmitri had eagerly volunteered to be their first test subject. Now he was about to take his first bite.

"I've got a bezoar right here in case anything goes wrong," Olive said, wielding the antidote in her hand lest the garlic harm Dmitri again. "Don't be afraid."

"Vampires aren't afraid to bite anything. It's the other way around."

Olive grinned. "Just eat it!"

Dmitri bit. He chewed. For a few moments, he considered. "Delightfully crunchy," he said. "The perfect balance of buttery and oily. Just the right amount of parsley. And the garlic is...it's better than blood. And best of all, it's not going to kill me!"

The three of them clinked their glasses in celebration. "A toast to Olive's brilliant idea to extend bakery hours and start serving drinks," Dmitri said. "The vampire community always appreciates another place that welcomes us at night. And they're going to love this garlic bread."

"To alchemical innovation," added the old warlock.

"A toast," Olive began, "to toast." She picked up a piece of garlic bread, and was glad to see the others do the same. They tapped the three of them together, laughing as a bit of crust flaked off into Dmitri's wine. "To success and new friends!"

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